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CARSTONE RECTORY.

A STORY.

BY

GEORGE GRAHAM.

"The world's infectious; few bring back at eve,
Immaculate, the manners of the morn."—YOUNG.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CARSTONE RECTORY.

CHAPTER I.

— “ Ah me ! how weak a thing
The heart of woman is ! ” — *Julius Cæsar.*

“ BATH,” “ Bath,” “ Bath.” The word loudly repeated from carriage to carriage of the up-train roused Eleanor Stuart from a fit of deep and painful thought, and she immediately became alive to the necessary calls upon the attention of the unattended traveller. With a blank feeling of disappointment she looked out on the platform, and failed to discover any familiar face ; any one to meet her, that inde-

scribable comfort to a lady at the end of a journey, be it long or short, difficult or easy. As such was not forthcoming, she quietly made her way down to the spot where her fellow-passengers were waiting, some impatiently, and others very calmly, according to their different temperaments, for the descent of their luggage through a large trap-door. The place where they had to stand was unprotected from the weather, and a depressing small rain was falling, giving a chilly sensation and a consciousness that summer was changing into autumn.

“Is that you? How do you do?” said a bustling little man, close to Eleanor’s elbow; she looked up and recognised a Mr Curtis, with whom she had a slight acquaintance.

“Horrid shame this,” said he when she had returned his salutation, “to keep ladies and gentlemen here, like dogs waiting for their dinner. Why, I declare it’s the worst station all down the line; nothing to cover one, in rain, or snow, or hail, or burning sun. My

wife caught the worst face-ache here that she ever had in her life. Halloo ! put that port-manteau down, that's mine. No 't is n't. As I was saying, Miss Stuart, you may call your Bath the most refined city in the world, and so I dare say it is, but I declare it has the worst-managed station all down the line."

"It is rather inconvenient," returned Eleanor, steadily fixing her eyes on the descending luggage, and watching for the bright blue cross which distinguished her own.

"*Rather* inconvenient, I should say it was ; I shall be wet through, for I lost my umbrella in that omnibus at Bristol. I have half a mind—stop, where are you taking that carpet bag? *Put it down, I say!* Do you hear? I beg your pardon, all right ; it was so like mine, I could have sworn to it. I have half a mind—I have more than half a mind, to write to the *Times* about this station as soon as I get home."

"You will change your mind, Sir, and think better of it when you get home," said a tall young man who was waiting with as much patience as if he had been as inanimate as the wooden pillar against which he was leaning. "The *Times* seems to me as if it were everybody's mamma, and we are always threatening to tell her of everything, as we used to do in the nursery, and then forgot all about it before we appeared in the drawing-room."

"Not so bad that, Sir, not so bad," returned Mr Curtis, "for the country is like our mother, and the *Times* is the voice of the country. There, put that aside, for that is mine. Where can the other be? Bless me, I wish they would put the things out alphabetically as they do at Paddington. Now that is a station, if you like, all the world over."

"That is mine, I have no more," said Eleanor, quietly pointing out a large box to a flyman, who was waiting behind her.

"How well you manage, to be sure; and

how did you know it so soon ? ” exclaimed Mr Curtis. “ Ah, I see, what a capital plan that blue cross. I declare I ’ll have a union-jack pocket-handkerchief fastened on my boxes when I travel next. I never will go through all this again.”

“ All what ? ” said the imperturbable young man. “ Why, you see that a lady—” He did not finish what he was about to say, for he had glanced at Eleanor as she walked towards her fly, and there was a something about her which checked all comment from a stranger’s lips.

It would have been expecting too much from Mr Curtis to have imagined that he could leave his post of observation of the important trap-door for the sake of handing a lady into a fly ; he, however, contrived to give Eleanor a hasty bow, in which only one eye appeared to be engaged, and said something about calling shortly and bringing his wife.

The door was closed, the steps smartly shut

up, the direction given to the flyman, and Eleanor was on her way to Rivers Street.

Every object looked dismal through the small rain, in the deepening twilight, and Eleanor's spirit had within itself no brightness. She was in that mood when familiar things bring a sensation of pain. At first she looked out upon the Institution, with its air of studious quiet, on the grand old Abbey, and the frowning Guildhall, looking all so sombre under the heavy, leaden sky, and then she leaned back wearily for the rest of her drive. Happy those who have never felt with Naomi, that they went out full and have returned home empty !

In a dark-looking room on the parlour floor, in Rivers Street, sat Mrs Grant, the Aunt Jane with whom was Eleanor Stuart's present home. She was a small, elderly lady, with a fidgety, fretful countenance, and an appearance of ill health, which seemed to justify the deplorable account she always gave of herself, and the

fact that on no occasion had she ever been known to answer, "Quite well, thank you," to the customary salutation of "How do you do?" On the present occasion she was waiting with a mixture of pleasant anticipation and nervous anxiety for the expected arrival. She loved Eleanor better than any other human being, though she seldom gave expression to the real warmth of her feelings towards her. In manner she was often cold, and the habit of considering herself an invalid had made her at times exacting and self-indulgent. She had always treated her niece kindly in great matters, though in small ones she could be trying, sometimes even irritating. In the companionship of the aunt and niece there was nothing unpleasant or dependent on either side, for while Eleanor was grateful for the advantage of having a home with so near a relative, who, in the time of her trouble, had shown her great kindness, she felt that one often really unwell, and always fancying herself so, depended upon her so much, that the

advantage was mutual. She had enough with careful economy to provide for all her personal wants, and therefore, independent in spirit as she was, she had no uncomfortable feeling as to her position ; in fact, had such existed, she could not, as she had often done, with equal gentleness and justice have weighed acts of substantial kindness against the hasty speech, the tart reply, the fit of wearying moroseness or peevishness, till they proved by far the heavier, and left her affection and even esteem for her aunt untarnished as before.

“ Perhaps the train is late,” thought Mrs Grant, “ and perhaps, poor thing, she could not find her luggage. I wish I had had somebody to send to meet her, but she knows how difficult it is to get such things done here,” and she put on her spectacles again, for the fourth time during the last five minutes, and tried to read the Bath Chronicle. “ I wonder if Mrs Manners will cook the dinner better now ; I dare say she will, for I think she is afraid of

Eleanor. I wonder if that little lobster is come in that I ordered for a relish with her tea; I don't like to ring and inquire, for only Mrs Manners is at home, and she is too much for my nerves."

In the midst of these thoughts, a fly stopped at the door, and Eleanor, soon after, was by her aunt's side. After her affectionate and gentle greeting was over, she was listening to all the details which must be gone through, she knew, before any other topic could be entered upon. Mrs Grant, somehow, felt that she was making too good and too sympathizing a listener. She did not lightly turn aside her complaints, or reply to them in a way which would rouse and entertain her in spite of herself.

"Had you not better go up-stairs and take off your things, and get comfortable in time for your tea?" said Mrs Grant, at last stopping short in her account of Mr Frompton's newly-excited suspicions that she might have an affection of the heart.

Eleanor was leaning back, holding her bonnet by the strings, and her shawl was thrown over the back of the chair.

Mrs Manners entered, and placed the lighted lamp upon the small tea-table ; Mrs Grant looked up at Eleanor's pale countenance, looking still paler from the contrast with her dark hair, now falling lower than she was in the habit of wearing it, added to which was the wearied expression which travelling gives to those who are not strong.

"The country air has done you no good, Eleanor ; you are not looking so well as when you went away."

Eleanor roused herself, and rose to go upstairs. She did not wish that any one should think her looking ill—they *must not* think it.

On the stairs she encountered Mrs Manners, who had been there lying in wait. She went up before her with great civility, to see, as she said, and make sure that everything was comfortable. When they reached the

landing, she opened the door, of what to Eleanor was a strange room, and seemed to invite her to enter, which she did, thinking she wished to show her some improvement, and being too courteous to refuse.

“You see, Miss Stuart, I have made this room as nice and convenient as possible,” said Mrs Manners with a half courtesy, which was a great concession from her, and a very smiling face, “and if you want anything else you have only to speak.”

Eleanor looked round the room, which was smaller and not so well furnished as the one she was in the habit of occupying. On the floor was her box, uncorded, and her umbrella had been deposited in one corner.

“But this is not my room.”

“No, Miss, it is not what *was* your room, but I thought you would have no objection to change, as I have let my drawing-rooms, and the lady thought she should like the other better, as you see it’s closer to her own, and

I mentioned it to Mrs Grant, and she said she *dare say* you would n't mind, for this room is every bit as good as the other; and, to my mind, it is better now, for it's much more cheerful."

"This room will not suit me," said Eleanor, quietly.

"Why, you see I can't well change now, as the lady fixed upon it."

"You should have told the lady the circumstances."

"Why, so I did, but she said young ladies never minded moving about, and she should feel more comfortable if her maid slept near her."

"Is she an invalid?"

"Why, no, I can't say she is, but I am sure, Miss, for the sake of quiet, you'll make no bones about it. You know your aunt can't bear a fuss."

"There is no need of one. This room does

not suit me, and you will have the kindness to get my things removed to my own."

Firmness was the only weapon which could subdue Mrs Manners; she was proof against any kind of storm; and complaints, however long continued, had no effect upon her. She flushed with anger, but she intended to yield, for Mrs Grant was a constant lodger, and the new-comer appeared so full of whims, that her next might be to leave her; still she would make her submission as uncomfortable as she could.

"Well, I'm sure *I* see nothing to find fault with in this room, and, besides, it's all fitted up and ready, sheets and all, and the other wants cleaning out, for *of course* I had this one done first, and Mary's gone home to see her mother, and there's no one to make the bed, or to do anything."

Eleanor turned away to return down-stairs.

"But, Miss Stuart, what's to be done with

this great box? 'Tis more than any woman's strength can carry; I got the flyman to bring it up-stairs and uncord it."

"I will send in a chairman to-morrow to remove it."

"But, Miss, really now, could n't you manage here for one night, and we'll talk with Mrs Grant about it to-morrow, and perhaps the lady will call, and she would give it up with a better grace if she saw she had the choice," and Mrs Manners gave a sort of confidential smile, which meant that she knew the weaknesses of human nature, and how to act upon them.

"I prefer being settled at once," returned Eleanor, politely, "therefore you will be so kind, Mrs Manners, as to have my room ready for me by bed time. Do n't trouble yourself at all about the box to-night, I can do without it." And waiting to hear no more, she went down to her aunt's room, to deposit her bonnet

and shawl so as to prevent any inquiry which might lead to an explanation which would disturb Mrs Grant, and threaten to keep her awake all night. She felt that the little encounter had done her no harm ; and her stand against encroachment had brought some colour to her cheek, and arrested the depressing train of thought under the influence which she had returned. It soothed and gratified her, when again with Mrs Grant, to perceive what pleasure her presence gave her ; she now prized affection even more than she had done before, and she felt that her heart had been softened, and that her feelings were more easily touched. Sorrow to her spirit already had ministered good. Mrs Grant made the tea herself, as she insisted on not passing over that great exertion to Eleanor until the morrow. When all was prepared, she perceived that the crowning part of the meal was wanting, and she rang the bell, Mrs Manners ap-

peared, having thrown the door open very wide, as was her custom when not in a good humour.

“ Will you bring up the lobster, if you please ? ”

“ There is no lobster come, ma’am,” returned Mrs Manners, in a tone of triumph, as if its non-arrival were a source of personal satisfaction.

“ Do you think you could send for it, it is only down Russell Street, to that shop near the Assembly Rooms ? ”

“ Impossible, ma’am, Mary is out, and I am the only person in the house.” This was perfectly true, and the excuse was quite valid, but it was made with a gusto which was quite irritating to poor Mrs Grant, who could not bear to be disappointed in anything.

“ Dear, dear, Eleanor, I am so vexed ; I am sure you want something with your tea, as you dined so early, and I ordered the lobster on purpose for you, as I knew you would like it.”

“Thank you very much for being so kind,” said Eleanor, sweetly; “your thinking about it gives me quite as much pleasure as if I had eaten it; I want nothing but tea.”

Mrs Manners departed to her disagreeable duties up-stairs, and Eleanor, having with some difficulty induced Mrs Grant to think no more of the lobster, led her to speak of herself, and to tell her how she had been passing her time in her absence. The tea had refreshed her, and it was a relief to talk of anything that had no reference to Carstone or Steyne. But this could not of course continue; Mrs Grant's first topic of interest was herself and her ailments, but the next must be the absorbing interest of the new engagement. Eleanor having first dreaded any allusion to it, at last waited for it with a kind of feverish anxiety; a proud and sensitive nature is, on some occasions, quickly suspicious. Why did her aunt avoid it? Why did she not bring it up? it would be so natural for her to do so. Would

it not have been still more natural for Eleanor to have commenced the subject? She knew it, but she could not.

Mr Bromley was spoken of, and then Mrs Lonsdale, and at the mention of her name, Mrs Grant played with her spectacles, pulling them out of their case and putting them back again, and not looking very cordial, and then she said abruptly :

“ Flora is engaged then, already.”

“ Yes.”

“ I knew it would not be long before her mother managed it. I know Louisa of old.”

“ Her prospects are now everything that could be wished.”

“ Yes, of course they are, and yet Louisa pretended in her last letter to regret that she had engaged herself so young.”

“ Did she? I am surprised at that.”

“ Is she such a wonderful beauty as they make out? ”

“ She is extremely pretty.”

"And he very handsome, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"What is his living worth?"

"Seven or eight hundred a year, I believe."

"Ah, so Louisa told me, but she is not over accurate. What a description she gave of him! he must be something out of the common way, I suppose. When are they to be married?"

"The time is not fixed."

"Well, some people have a way of getting on, and making others get on too. I don't know how they manage it. Do you know that the drawing-rooms are let?"

"Yes, Mrs Manners told me so."

"Only think, Dr Lonsdale's widow, Flora's aunt, has just taken them. You remember her, don't you? I don't know what sort of a neighbour we shall find her, but if she does not like us, we can keep ourselves to ourselves, I suppose. She called on me the other day, and made a great boast of all the people she knows in Bath. If she has such good in-

roductions as she pretends, she would be a nice person to take you to the Rooms. She asked a great deal about Flora, and you can tell her all that she wants to know. You look tired," she added, after their conversation had continued a little longer, "and my headache is coming on, so I think we had better go to bed."

Eleanor placed the Bible with the large print before her aunt, and taking another herself, she read, in her soft, musical voice, words which raise us above this earth and all its hopes.

CHAPTER II.

"Weak thou art, and very erring,
Mortal, whosoe'er thou art;
Then forbear, despise not any
Even in thy secret heart.

"From the sight of others' folly
Turn away, and look within;
Ask if that which sits in judgment
May not be the greater sin."

It was morning, strong, healthful, power-giving morning, when "the buoyant breath" of industry was inspiring myriads, when the most active were putting forth all their powers, and even the idlest had a something to attend

to, which could be better done at that time than in the more interrupted hours of the older day.

It was morning, and Eleanor Stuart sat with the breakfast things still before her, though her solitary meal had long been finished. Her elbow was resting upon the table, with her hand supporting her head, and she was entirely unoccupied. She had given way to depressing, unprofitable musing, such a mood as saps the very foundations of fortitude and strength. Ah, Eleanor, rise up to some duty, the very smallest will do—only be acting, and not thinking, at such a time as this.

* * * *

“Really, Eleanor, what have you been about? Why, I thought you had had the table cleared long ago,” and Mrs Grant appeared from the adjoining room, in her dressing-gown. “I am expecting Mrs Porter every minute to try on my dress, and I must have her in this room, for my own is so dark that she can never see to

fit me properly in it. I don't know what she will think if she finds the breakfast on the table, so late as it is, and she is one of the greatest gossips in Bath, and tells of everything she sees, and more too." Mrs Grant rang the bell, adding fretfully, "I dare say we shan't get attended to now, for they must be upstairs by this time, making the beds."

"I am going up, and I will send Mary," said Eleanor, and she departed to fulfil her promise; but ere she had reached the first landing, she heard a business-like, important ring at the door-bell, giving a suspicion that Mrs Porter had already arrived, which suspicion was confirmed by a sound of the opening and shutting of doors. She felt uncomfortable and vexed, for she knew that this would make Mrs Grant disturbed and nervous, and that it was her fault. These feelings did not make more congenial the irksome task of unpacking, a task which can be performed, oh, how easily and cheerfully when we return in gladsome

spirits and renovated health from some happy visit, which has left us food for gay discussion and for pleasant thought; but which may be so trying and wearisome, when each article, trivial in itself, reminds us of what we would fain forget for ever.

* * * *

The box which had been pronounced the night before by Mrs Manners to be too heavy for any amount of female strength, had this morning been removed by herself in a more relenting mood, with the aid of Mary, whose activity behind the scenes did a great deal to atone for her deficiency in many of the essential qualities of a show servant.

Mary's principles were utilitarian; what was necessary she would do without a murmur. She knew that houses must be kept clean, that food must be dressed, and that sick people must be waited upon; but as for the ornamental and superficial requirements of society, she looked upon them with a secret contempt, which if

avowed would certainly have driven herself or Mrs Grant from Rivers Street. Many visitors, intimate or careless enough to come without a card-case, had had their names forgotten, as not worthy of any effort of memory, as soon as they had turned away at the sound of "not at home," and many morning callers had let themselves out, while Mrs Grant reposed in the happy belief that her bell had been responded to, and that Mary had done the honours of their departure.

Eleanor was still occupied with her unpacking, which she was now trying to complete as quickly as possible.

Mary tapped at her door.

"If you please, ma'am, Miss Curryer is below, and says she won't go till she has seen you." Mary was not famed as an improver of messages.

Miss Curryer was no favourite with Eleanor, and a visit from any one in her present mood would have been unwelcome ; besides, she felt

that disagreeable addition to an interruption, the consciousness that what she was prevented finishing ought to have been done much earlier. She gave a glance at her mirror, and perceived that wearied and pallid look which had such a power over her appearance, whose attraction, as has been before observed, depended so much on the state of the spirit within. This view of herself did not make the more agreeable the first greeting of Miss Curryer, whose indulgence in personal remarks made her unpopular with most people, and especially dreaded by those of a sensitive nature.

"Why, dear me, my dear Miss Stuart, I can't compliment you on your looks; your change to the country has certainly done *you* no good. Why, you haven't even so much colour as you had before you went away."

"I am well, thank you," returned Eleanor, with cold politeness, "but my journey perhaps has tired me a little."

"Why, you do n't call that a journey ; I am sure you can't be strong if such a little tires you. You are thinner, I should say, certainly thinner than when you went away. I should strongly advise you to try cod's liver oil."

"Thank you, I never take anything without medical advice."

"Then it is time you had it, I think. You should talk to Mr Frompton the next time he comes to see your aunt ; there is nothing like looking to a thing in time."

"There is nothing to look to, I assure you. I am quite well."

"And a journey of any length is tiring," interposed Mrs Grant. "I am sure the very thought of one is enough for me."

"Ah, poor dear, you are so delicate. I am afraid Mr Frompton does n't understand your case. Why don't you try homœopathy ? I would, let who would be offended ; for if a doctor can't cure one, I should be glad to know of what use he is?"

"No doctor can give one a new constitution," said Mrs Grant, in a tone of resignation.

This being an assertion which could not be contradicted, it had the effect of closing the subject.

"So I understand," said Miss Curryer, in a tone of animation, turning to Eleanor, "that there is to be a match in your family. And a very good one, I believe, which it is a treat to hear, for such matches as have been going on here are enough to make one wonder, if one could wonder at anything in these days."

Miss Curryer was an elderly lady, of a stout, comfortable appearance, from whom strangers expected the greatest good-nature; but upon further acquaintance they discovered her to be a severe critic, and, what was worse, a not very truthful commentator on the doings of her neighbours. Eleanor regarded her with a contempt which no one human being ought to have for another.

"Tell me, Miss Stuart, tell me all about it."

"Your information is quite correct; my cousin, Miss Lonsdale, is engaged to Mr Mor-daunt."

"He is a clergyman, is n't he?"

"He is."

"And has a living?"

"Yes, he is Rector of Steyne. You may have heard me speak of it,—it is the village adjoining Carstone."

Eleanor had conquered herself by an inward struggle, who knows how great? she was now mistress of herself, and she would excite no suspicion by short replies.

"Is he a Puseyite or Low Church?"

"He is neither: his views, I believe, are judicious and moderate."

"And they say he has a large private fortune?"

"If the trustees of the settlement shall happen to be satisfied, I suppose the rest of the world need not be troubled as to that

matter," and Eleanor commanded herself so far as to give the smile which was required to prevent this speech being rude. That smile saved her with Miss Curryer, for she was examining her with a less excusable motive than curiosity, and the conversation continued, and Eleanor was equal to it, for her outward armour was on. Miss Curryer contrived to glean information invaluable to her for further visits, and Eleanor yielded all that it was right to give, more than she would have given had the matter been an indifferent one, for she generally disappointed with adroitness Miss Curryer's insatiable and often impertinent inquisitiveness. Mrs Grant had, during Eleanor's absence, fancied it better for her health to dine early, and now Mary, too much accustomed to Miss Curryer's long visits to stand upon any ceremony with her, entered to lay the cloth. This sight, which would have made visitors in the least scrupulous beat a hasty

retreat, had only the effect of making this one rise from her chair, and standing she continued her talk in a way which Mary inwardly stigmatized as neither staying nor going. At length, when the last spoon had been placed upon the table, she took her departure, promising to drop in again shortly, and begging Miss Stuart soon to give her a call before twelve o'clock, as she was generally out after that hour.

Soon after the door had closed upon her, Mary entered and placed the dinner upon the table in a series of little jerks, expressive of her disapprobation of such early and interrupting visitors.

Eleanor, with a flushed cheek and a sensation of fretting irritation, the effect of the ordeal she had undergone, sat down opposite her aunt, and commenced carving a very tough duck, which had been chosen by Mrs. Manners in a bad humour, for at such a time all faculties of judgment and discernment

appeared to forsake her. Something had evidently discomposed Mrs Grant, for she made no observations of her own accord, and when Eleanor addressed her she made her replies as short as possible. A sensitive nature, uncorrected, in time becomes peevish and gloomy, and so it was with Mrs Grant,—the things that used to vex or hurt her now put her out of temper. Eleanor could not tell that Miss Curryer's conversation had been as distasteful to her aunt as to herself, and that that cross, morose-looking face, frowning at each attempt to cut anything off the tough wing of the duck, was occasioned by deep disappointment on her account, and by the failure of a day-dream which had been very bright to Mrs Grant, of seeing the girl, of whom in her heart she was so proud, placed in a position worthy of her. The window suggested by the mocking, critical god might not always do harm !

When the cloth had been removed, Mrs Grant, who wanted something on which to

vent her present mood, broke silence, and attacked the dinner, especially the duck, in every possible way, and with an acrimony which the occasion did not appear to merit. Eleanor received her continued and repeated complaints in the most mollifying manner, that is, she agreed in the main point of their justice. She really tried to restore her aunt's placidity, and she in a great measure succeeded. She did not know that the duck, like the boy who was whipped instead of the youthful James the First, received the blame intended for the fickle Henry Mordaunt.

"To-morrow morning I shall be quite at leisure to go to the market myself," said Eleanor, "and your dinner, which is of so much consequence when a person is not strong, shall not vary with the temper of Mrs Manners."

"But I don't much like your walking about in the town by yourself."

Eleanor made no answer to this objection.

She knew she could manage for her aunt better than Mrs Manners could, or, more truly speaking, would, and as she meant to go herself, she would raise no argument that would make her aunt uncomfortable.

The small autumnal rain of yesterday was falling again this afternoon. Mrs Grant leaned back in her easy chair, with the intention of attempting a nap, and Eleanor drew out her writing materials and commenced a letter to Mr Bromley. She began it, but she could not get on. Cold, unsatisfactory, and unlike herself, was every sentence. She tore up the sheet and began afresh, but with no better success. How was this? She generally wrote with the greatest ease, even on the most difficult subjects, to people the most difficult to deal with, when such came in her way, and Mr Bromley was a man so pleasant to correspond with, so capable of entering into the deepest thoughts, or enjoying the lightest descriptions. You might write to Mr Bromley about anything,

provided only that you presented him with no gloomy or discontented views, and made the best of everything. Was her heart contracting that she could find no kind, congenial expressions for so esteemed and valued a friend? Had that which had blasted one feeling as with a lightning stroke destroyed all others? No! it could not be, it was absurdity to have such a thought, and yet she could not write. Perhaps it was because the room was close and oppressive after the unaccustomed early dinner, and Mrs Grant could never bear the window open, even for five minutes, when it was raining. She began a third time, for Mr Bromley was particular about ladies travelling alone, and would be anxious to hear by the earliest post that she had had a pleasant journey. A few words only were written this time, when a thundering double-knock was heard, startling Mrs Grant from her contemplated nap, as she had only yet achieved a kind of dreamy wakefulness. A visitor was announced, one of that

class whom Eleanor ranked as nondescript beings, whose presence could bring nothing of interest, and this one was followed by a second, and that second by a third, and so the whole afternoon wore away, and hour after hour was passed by Eleanor in outward politeness and an inward weariness, which, in her present frame of mind, seemed almost unbearable. The whole conversation around her appeared made up of irksome littleness and narrow-minded gossip, and, in not making one effort to improve it, she was wanting in one of the best social duties of the cultivated intellect, which, instead of censuring or condemning, would ever do well to employ its powers, as in an earnest cause, in raising the tone of every mind which comes in contact with it.

An intimate acquaintance, who had felt privileged to pass the bounds of the usual time allowed to callers, at length departed, and at a quarter to seven the aunt and niece were left to themselves. Mrs Grant was as

little talkative at first as she had been during dinner, but the tea refreshed her, and Eleanor, who had an habitual dislike to early hours, to-day felt grateful for its soothing influence. A little talk, the most pleasant they had interchanged all day, passed, and then Eleanor once more commenced her letter. Easy it now seemed, even in her sadness, to write to that kind appreciating friend, and, though many things were difficult to touch upon, she managed them very well now. She stopped once and paused for some time. She was thinking of the value of kindred regard. She was asking herself if it should not be enough to satisfy the heart in our short passage through a life of trial. She was telling herself that in many cases it must be, and happy were those who had it; and then followed a keen sense of the spirit's craving after more, and of its desolation if that more were denied.

"Eleanor," said Mrs Grant, suddenly, "if you do n't write on, that letter can't go to-night,

for you know what a fuss we have to get any one to go to the post after nine."

Eleanor dipped her pen in the ink, and went on without stopping until she had finished, and then Mary, who respected Miss Stuart as much as it was in her irreverent nature to respect any one, put on her bonnet and shawl, and started off to the Post Office, without condescending any reference to Mrs Manners, whose constant habit of saying "no," as a first impulse, to the most simple request, was, in Mary's opinion, as it would have been in that of most other people, extremely irritating and objectionable.

CHAPTER III.

I have not that alacrity of spirit,
Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have.

King Richard III.

“Do get up and look, Eleanor ; did you ever see such a quantity of luggage ? ” and Mrs. Grant, forgetting all the ailments which usually oppressed her spirits in the morning, employed herself in watching intently the unloading of a fly, upon the roof of which boxes of all sizes had been piled, while out of its interior came carpet bags, a dressing-case, and several baskets of different shapes. “ Do you think Mrs. Lonsdale herself is in the fly, or is this only the

maid sent on with the boxes? I dare say she intends to stay here all the winter. She is a great person for dress, and I have no doubt she has had all her things made in London. She is such a fine figure too, and sets off a dress so well."

Eleanor looked out on the bustle of the arrival with that appearance of interest which we give when called upon, for she was in a mood to feel but little in reality.

"I wonder," said Mrs Grant, "how we shall get on with her, being in the same house? I am very glad that the drawing-rooms are let at last, for it is so lonely to have them empty; particularly now the autumn is coming. I used when you were away to fancy, when I got nervous of an evening, that ghosts were sitting up there, in all the empty chairs, and that they must be glad to get a quiet place all to themselves, with nobody talking in it. I don't like being alone, it always makes me so foolish and fanciful. Hark, what is all that

about ? ” and she stopped to listen to a lively altercation which was going on in the entrance passage, between the flyman and Mary, the latter insisting upon his taking the luggage up-stairs himself, which he resisted as a thing altogether preposterous and unusual ; at last Mary gained her point, as persons of a determined mind very often do, and he not only carried the things up, but he did it with a degree of civility which rarely accompanies a man’s performance of anything against his will.

“ What a spirit that girl has, to be sure,” observed Mrs Grant ; “ I wish she had a better way of announcing people, but one can’t have everything.” Having said this, she quickly returned to her easy chair, fearing lest she might be observed by Mrs Lonsdale, now emerging herself from the fly. “ I wonder how we shall get on with her ? ” she added, as the thought which had been teasing her at intervals again arose.

"Very well, I dare say," returned Eleanor, "if we leave her alone at first; if I remember her correctly, she is not a person to be sought."

"And do I ever seek anybody?" retorted Mrs Grant; "and how is it possible to leave a person alone who is in the same house? I think you get very unsociable; how could we leave her alone? I am sure we must call upon her immediately, and pay her every civility."

"Certainly we must."

"Then how can we leave her alone?"

"I simply meant that she thinks more of those who leave her to seek them. I was speaking generally."

"But I asked you a particular question," and Mrs Grant took up the paper, and twisted it about very much before she fixed upon a portion to read, and knit her brows, and looked very uncomfortable, for she had made her first observation in the hope of having an uneasy doubt removed, and of being assured

that she and Dr Lonsdale's widow would be the best of friends.

In the earlier part of the morning Eleanor had been to the market, and made such purchases as she hoped would turn out well. Then her spirits, which had been equal to this first exertion for the day, flagged; a something was needed to keep her mind in tone, and now she did what the depressed should never do,—she spent the remaining time before dinner in a desultory way, reading the paper when her aunt had finished it, and then taking up the book which happened to be the nearest to her, and so time passed on, and that was all; the pulse of life, beating so languidly, had not been quickened, the stagnant feelings had received no outlet for a healthy flow. The dinner, upon which Eleanor had bestowed much forethought, was placed upon the table nicely and carefully dressed, and Mrs Grant was pleased with the partridge delicately prepared for herself, and enjoyed it very much; but she would have

enjoyed it still more if the expression on her only companion's face had been a different one, for there is no such sauce for the appreciation of anything as the animation and pleasure of those around us. After dinner Mrs Grant tried to compose herself for the nap which she had been told would be good for her nerves, but it would not come at her bidding, though she closed her eyes, and did all she could to court it. She could only think, and her thoughts, judging from her countenance, were not at all pleasant ones; so Eleanor decided as she occasionally looked up from the book which was not occupying her attention. This would not do, this *must* not do; her aunt would begin to suspect what she was striving to hide, deep, deep from every mortal eye,—and how striving? was she succeeding? was she herself? And then that conversation with Mrs Lonsdale in the store-room at Carstone recurred to her, bringing a sensation of acute pain. Had not she alluded to the surprise

expressed in Mrs Grant's letter when she first received the news of the engagement?

"Eleanor," said Mrs Grant, opening her eyes, perhaps tired of shutting them so long to no purpose, "why do n't you walk out? You will never get any colour if you stay so much in the house."

"I will go out presently. Do n't you think it would do you good to have a chair to take you round the park."

"No: not to-day. Mr Frompton says I must quite get rid of my cough first, and I do n't see much use in paying for a thing that only does one harm. Do open the window a little way, the room is so warm, and Mrs Lonsdale might give us a call this afternoon; she is a great one for ceremony, and so I suppose she will come first, as she knows the local etiquette; so, upon second thoughts, I think you had better not go out, for I am sure I am not equal to much talking this afternoon, and she will want to know so much about everybody. But dear,

dear, you ought to go out, for you look so pale; I do n't know how to manage it, I am sure; what shall we do?"

"Shall I stay in for her 'till three o'clock, and then go out?"

"But suppose she should come at four, which is my very worst time—just when I begin to feel weak for want of my tea."

"I had better stay in altogether then; you know I went out a little after breakfast."

"Yes, but what was that? Only down to the market and back, seeing nothing but those meat and fish stalls, enough to make anybody ill. Eleanor, I must have you give up going to that market; I can't have you look so pale. Do you think it is that dress you have on? it has no colour about it. You should wear some kind of ribbon, to give it animation. Perhaps you had better go up and put on something brighter. No, don't, I hear somebody coming, and if it is Mrs Lonsdale, you must stay to talk to her."

A tap was heard at the door, and the customary answer was followed by the appearance of a good-looking, rather too showily-dressed servant girl, with a little French cap just on the back of her head, showing that she barely yielded to that sad necessity of her position which required her to wear one at all.

"If you please, ma'am, Mrs Lonsdale requests her compliments to yourself and Miss Stuart, and begs to know if it would be agreeable for her to pay her respects to you now."

"My compliments to Mrs Lonsdale, and we shall be most happy to see her."

The servant disappeared.

"How very fortunate, Eleanor, that you had not gone out. Do put on a pink bow the next time you wear that stone-coloured dress."

"I wish she looked as she did before she went to Carstone," thought Mrs Grant, "for nobody looks better than Eleanor when she does look well, and this Mrs Lonsdale, I am

sure, is such a critic over girls, and thinks only those that she takes about with her worth looking at."

A sound of rustling silk along the passage put a stop to further reflection, and Mrs Lonsdale entered, announced by Mary in a rather sulky voice, for she was of opinion that one lady might very easily walk down-stairs to see another, without giving her the trouble of coming up to open the door, and pronounce a name about which nobody could have any possible doubt.

Mrs George Lonsdale was the widow of a younger brother of Col. Lonsdale; so she was only Mrs Lonsdale in the absence of her sister-in-law at Carstone. She was a fine, tall woman, with a fashionable air, and well dressed; in her manner there was too much cordiality for everybody; it gave a sort of suspicion of insincerity, which however could scarcely be brought home to her, for her treatment of others was, as a rule, polite and consist-

ent ; and if, as the uncharitable supposed, she had a motive to answer in all her actions, that motive was so well concealed, that refreshing, straightforward, unsuspicious beings who are happily to be found in most places, never imagined it to exist at all.

“ How do you do, my dear Mrs Grant ? ” was Mrs George Lonsdale’s first greeting, “ how delighted I am to see you again ; and how perfectly charmed I was to find apartments vacant in the same house with yourself and your niece.” And she held Mrs Grant’s hand a long time in hers, and looked into her face with affectionate *empressement*. “ And how are you ? ” she added, turning to Eleanor with equal warmth ; “ my dear Miss Stuart, how good you were to come home just before my arrival. I was so afraid they would have kept you a prisoner at Carstone, when you will be so invaluable to me at this dull time, for really it is dull in Bath before November fairly sets in ; then it is delicious, and we shall

have some fine fun together, I make no doubt. Do you expect a good season ? ”

“ They say it will be a better one than Bath has seen for many years, but you know they say that every year.”

“ That ’s beautiful ! how sharp you are. I will introduce a man to you who is too hard upon me ; you shall drink tea with me when he comes, and keep him in order—I never can ; I think he was brought up at St Omers, and men are turned out so sharp from that place ; some witty person compared them to something, but I can’t remember what.”

“ Shall you remain here the whole winter ? ” asked Mrs Grant.

“ Yes, the very whole of the winter and part of the spring, that is, till after Easter. I think Bath such a very charming place to winter in ; if I like it I shall come here always. Bath I am told has only one fault, that is, a scarcity of gentlemen ; but I know so many, that I shall be sure to collect enough for any ball, I fancy, from dif-

ferent parts. They are always glad enough to come whenever I ask them. Do n't open those naughty eyes of yours, Miss Stuart, that tell all sorts of tales; I do n't mean that they come for love of me, but I always have pretty girls of my party, and make everything as pleasant as I can; you should study the art of making up parties, you will find it of infinite use when you are married. But now talking of getting married, do, my dear girl, tell me all about this affair of Flora's; I am dying of curiosity for *the truth*, you must understand, for my sister-in-law's letters, poor dear soul, are so overdrawn, and so skipping about from one thing to the other, and so making much of what is true, and making up what is not, that when I come to the end of them I am all in confusion."

"So am I," thought poor Mrs Grant; "how I wish she would n't talk so fast."

"Well now, tell me, Flora is really and truly engaged, is she not?"

"She is."

“ You are delightful, your answers are just to the point and no more. I should think you must be a great favourite with clever men, who knit their brows when one says a little too much—and I never could measure my words ; but I admire very much those who can. Now then, does the match satisfy everybody ? ” What a question ! The words with which Eleanor strove to reply seemed to choke her.

“ Now if I did n’t think as much ; you do n’t answer me ; I thought it was too bright to be all true. Poor dear Mrs Lonsdale had always such a habit of colouring.”

“ I assure you it is a very good match indeed, I had not the slightest intention of implying the contrary.”

“ But you do n’t think it so very good, I see. Why, after all, what is it ? A girl of spirit might find many a life to suit her better than being the good lady of a clergyman in the country, looking after the schools and measuring out the flannel at Christmas. But let us

proceed. Tell me all about this man, describe him exactly, for I know you must be a capital one at description. Begin now, and leave out nothing." And Mrs George fixed her eyes upon her with an expression of amusement and extreme interest. Mrs Grant felt that she must send for Mr Frompton, for she had that nervous shooting pain again across her chest.

"He is very handsome," replied Eleanor, "and very gentle in manner."

"But that description is very vague, my dear, and gives one the impression of a milk-sop. Has he a striking gentlemanly appearance, and does he look well in society?"

"Very."

"And is he clever and all that? and does he know how to talk?"

"Yes, very well indeed."

"And do you think he is the best match to be had in the neighbourhood?"

"Certainly."

"What a girl it is! She would do for a

witness-box. No lawyer would get anything out of her but what she chose. I shall have you to meet my husband's old friend, Dr Cobbett, Senior Fellow of Corpus, he would be charmed with you. But tell me now, is there not a Captain Headington just come home, who will be immensely rich ? ”

“ Yes : he is engaged to Lady Anastasia Gordon.”

“ Ah ! well, then there's an end of him ; but is there not somebody come into the Mountjoy estates ?—what is he like ? ”

“ He is a noble-hearted creature, who might have been made anything, but he was sadly neglected in his boyhood.”

“ Why ; do tell me why ? ”

“ His father married a poor village girl ; he and his wife both died very young, and Allan was left an orphan when he was about two years old. The Mountjoys, who never forgave the match, had the poor boy brought up in a way which they thought suited

his mother's station. He was kept in the stables some time, and helped to groom the horses."

"What a shame, to be sure ; and now he has come in for everything. I suppose they thought that as there were so many heirs, he would die in obscurity, and that the connection would be forgotten."

"Probably they did."

"Then I suppose that now he will take to the turf and to low company, and be a kind of monarch in a certain set, if he is not fit for the society of gentlemen."

"Oh, no ! he is a true gentleman, more worthy of the name he bears than many who have borne it before him."

"Bless me ! a stable-boy turned into a gentleman. Do n't you think, my dear Mrs Grant, that there are some rose-coloured spectacles at work here ? I know what young ladies' romance will do sometimes. Well, Lady Mountjoy, of Mountjoy Castle, would sound

exceedingly well; and you could visit about and keep your husband in the back-ground, and say that he was writing a book, or that he was a great geologist, and you could never get him out of his study."

Eleanor smiled, but made no reply. She had always felt too sincere a sympathy for Allan Mountjoy's peculiar position to be able to jest about him.

"I suppose you didn't fancy doing the goody in a country village; because if you all think this Mr Mordaunt such a perfection, why didn't you run away with him before Flora came home from school? You have known him sometime, have you not?"

"Yes, I knew him before he had Steyne; he paid a long visit to my uncle some time ago when I was also at Carstone."

"Ah, well, for all you say, I think school girls are too easily pleased. They take the first offer that comes, without waiting to look about them and find out their own value. I

think myself that Flora might have done better, if she has grown up as she promised ; she was very pretty at fourteen, and they say she has improved since then, and is now quite a beauty. Not that that way of talking always takes me in, for I have heard relations speak of beauties, and when I have seen them, bless me, what an absurdity it seemed ! Tell me now, Miss Stuart, you know what they call *belles* here ; is Flora superior to them ? Would she look better at the Rooms than Miss Tryon Jones, or Miss Cathcart, or the Miss Furnivalls ? ”

A painful fear rose up from the depths of Eleanor’s heart ; why was this question asked ? Would she, this fearless fashionable woman, try to interfere with Flora’s happy fate ?—a lot that promised all that is bright and blessed on this side the grave. A feeling, which only the noble in soul could appreciate, prompted Eleanor’s reply. “ She is pretty, certainly ; but it is difficult to say beforehand who would take in public.”

“Ha, ha !” thought the worldly Mrs George Lonsdale, “I see through you, my dear ; you are jealous of course, as every good-looking girl is of another. You don’t want your pretty cousin to be the *belle* of Bath, and to have a real lover too in the back-ground whom she may marry when she chooses if she meets with nothing better. No, no, you don’t want her to stand in your way here ; stop a bit, the season is not begun yet. I should like to have a look at my niece though before she shuts herself up.”

“Well, dear,” she said, addressing Eleanor, “you are perfectly correct in all your ideas. Tastes do differ amazingly about beauty.”

Here a thundering knock was heard. Mrs Lonsdale resolved to remain and see what this visitor was like, as it would be useful to know what kind of people her dear Mrs Grant ranked among her acquaintances.

“Mr Curtis,” said Mary, throwing the door open too wide (which she had many times

been warned not to do), and so bringing it into contact with the sofa upon which Mrs Lonsdale was seated, and causing a very unpleasant jar.

Mr Curtis entered with that assured air which some persons acquire from the happy belief that they are always welcome.

"Mrs Grant, I was determined to eke out five minutes for you, whatever else I was forced to neglect. I told you, Miss Stuart, that I should call; you always find me as good as my word."

"And we are very happy to see you," said Eleanor cordially, and in truth she was very glad to have a break in Mrs Lonsdale's conversation, which upon every topic chosen had happened to be unfortunate.

"How is Mrs Curtis?" asked Mrs Grant.

"Mrs Curtis, thank you, is exceedingly well, if she could only make herself think so. Upon my word, I expected and hoped that because our Queen is such a sensible, strong,

healthy, straightforward Englishwoman, ill-health would have gone out of fashion, but it has not."

"Oh, Mr Curtis!" sighed Mrs Grant; "how cruel of you to talk of any health being the fashion; but that is just like men—they are made of iron themselves, and they don't understand how different we are."

"But there is a fashion in health, my dear madam; people are short-sighted because it is the fashion; and they lisp and drawl, and play all kinds of antics, and when they are not up to anything lively, they make weakness a fashion."

"What have you done about the house?" asked Eleanor, knowing that he was touching upon delicate ground.

"That's the very thing I came to tell you about," he answered with great satisfaction. "I have secured the house for a twelvemonth, and a capital bargain I have made; I am generally lucky," and he looked all round for

sympathy, even into the face of Mrs George Lonsdale, who had retired behind a cautiously polite barrier, whence she was taking notes as to his eligibleness as an acquaintance ; for she was not a person to make a false step in a place so very exclusive as Bath.

“ I am very glad,” said Eleanor, “ and when does Mrs Curtis come ? ”

“ As soon as I have got everything in order for her. I am a very good husband, and take all the trouble upon myself.”

Here he looked so directly towards Mrs Lonsdale, that she considered it necessary to bend courteously, and to acknowledge the general fact that it is a very good thing for a man to be a good husband ; and this she did without any fear of having committed herself.

“ I shall have such a to-do to get everything up here,” continued Mr Curtis ; “ I wish Mrs Curtis could have made up her mind to stay in the country ; but she says that society is to her what food is to other people,

and as I did n't marry a wife to starve her, I thought I had nothing for it but to come."

"Very kind of you," said Mrs Grant.

"I wish Mrs Curtis could be of your opinion, but she thinks I never did anything right but once, and that is when I met her by appointment one fine morning at Trinity Church, Paddington."

Mrs Grant and Eleanor laughed good-naturedly, and Mrs Lonsdale gave a smile

"Gracious but unfamiliar."

"How's your good uncle, Miss Stuart?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Capital fellow as ever lived; and how is young Mordaunt? I knew his father very well indeed."

"Did you?" said Mrs Lonsdale, to whom this last observation was satisfactory.

"Yes, that I did, as gentlemanly a man as ever I met."

"And do you know the son?"

“ I knew him when he was quite a lad. Pleasant and gentlemanly I used to think, but rather slow.”

What a strange sensation this remark brought to Eleanor. She could not understand it. After this Mr Curtis began to rise in the opinion of Mrs Lonsdale, and as he was one of those transparent beings who soon let even strangers know all about their affairs, and that with an openness which to the practised ear gives a stamp of truth, she came to the decision that he should be allowed to visit her, when he made the attempt, which she had also decided that he should do. When Mr Curtis had departed, which he did in a very great bustle to catch the train, and Mrs Lonsdale had gone up-stairs to her own domain, Mrs Grant sank back fatigued and moody, in her easy chair, and Eleanor, knowing that at such a time perfect quiet is the best restorative, left her and went out for a short walk, to court the invigorating influence of fresh air before their early tea.

CHAPTER IV.

“ And small the intercourse, I ween,
Such uncongenial souls between.”

ROKEBY.

A SUCCESSION of rainy days had caused the gorgeous hues of autumn to pass away early from the hedgerows and woods in the beautiful neighbourhood of Bath ; it was but the middle of November, and yet the stern power of winter was already felt ; he came like an impatient and moody tyrant, denying the few sunny hours which at that season we prize so highly ; he came dreaded by many, but welcome to some. The tradespeople and lodging-house keepers of Bath rejoiced, and

saw with satisfaction the loaded omnibuses and flys driving busily from the station, full of those whose tours had been shortened by the cold, and who came as harbingers of a good and early season. Soon lodging boards began to disappear in some streets, and to become more scarce in all ; hand-bills increased in Orange Grove, to meet at once the eyes of the new arrivals, giving promise of every species of refined entertainment. Notices of a series of Pump-room Concerts were to be seen in almost every shop window ; and the public were prepared to expect even stars of the first magnitude to appear at different periods during the season, on the boards of the elegant little theatre, which is conducted so well, that even a critic from the metropolis might be satisfied with the performance. Subscription Books were opened at the Rooms for Balls, which were to exceed (so the Papers said) all that had taken place since the days of Beau Nash.

Announcements of lectures upon all kinds of

improving subjects were posted up at the Guildhall, so that the more thoughtful mind might console itself with the knowledge that some ballast would be placed in the hold of this vessel about to tempt the giddy waves of enjoyment with

“Youth at the prow and Pleasure at the helm.”

Everything was promising well for the prosperity of Bath, and Mrs George Lonsdale already congratulated herself upon having fixed upon it for her winter residence, and upon having turned a politely deaf ear to the persuasions of friends who had endeavoured to attract her to other pleasant parts of England. It has been said somewhere that people generally succeed in that which is the real aim of their life. Whether this saying be well founded or not, it was true so far as Mrs Lonsdale was concerned. Her aim was to get a good footing in society, and in this she was successful, and accordingly, as minds are constituted, this

would be deemed a rich or a very poor recompense for the exertion of all the energies of her character. Of an acquaintance worth preserving she never lost sight. No occasion for congratulation or condolence would she suffer to escape her attention. Her personal visits were always well timed, and her ready pen was never neglectful. Even when she quitted a place which there appeared no chance of her ever visiting again, she was careful to leave behind her as good an impression as if she intended speedily to return to it. She had learned when a child, and she had never forgotten, that civility costs nothing, and in this inexpensive article she was profusely liberal. She had two or three good introductions in Bath, which, under her skilful management, would produce many more ; and she had a few old acquaintances in the place who had never been suffered to forget her. Amongst the last, the most valuable was Lady Crampton, a very gay old lady, who had a good establishment in the Crescent. She had



been quite a *belle* in her youth, and having once tasted the Circean cup of the world's applause, she could never afterwards be happy without it ; that she was fond of flattery everybody knew, but nobody could administer it with the adroit daring of Mrs George Lonsdale, who, with penetration worthy of a better pursuit, had long since perceived that adulation, like any other pernicious drug, can be swallowed in incredible quantities by those accustomed to it. The good opinion of Lady Crampton would, by many, have been considered of itself enough to secure Mrs Lonsdale's position in the circle in which she intended to move, but that lady was too wise a tactician to allow herself to depend on the favour of any one individual. She studied to have so many friends and supporters, that the caprice of one could do her no serious harm ; and though in reality she courted Lady Crampton more than any one else, she only allowed her to suppose that personal attachment to her made her give

up the pressing claims of others. *Personal attachment*, no one could guess what a fascination existed in that one idea for poor old Lady Crampton, that fast-bound slave of a hollow world !

Upon nothing did Mrs George Lonsdale more pride herself than upon having obtained the *entrée* to Mrs Bolder's exclusive parties in Marlborough Buildings. Mrs Bolder was an old lady, so crabbed and disagreeable, that why any body sought her was a standing mystery, but they did. She was the fashion, and to put Mrs Bolder into an ill temper, which was unfortunately a very easy matter, was considered, by those who had the privilege of visiting her, a very great misfortune indeed.

Mr Curtis, having, with infinite pains and trouble, furnished his house to his satisfaction, brought his wife to Bath, when everything had been prepared for her reception, and at her request he removed his only son from Chel-

tenham to Bath, and placed him at the Pulteney College. Mrs Curtis was a very indolent person, who was never satisfied with the way in which active people got through their duties. Something always struck her as slovenly or mistaken, but she did nothing to rectify it. She had some theory in her own mind, which she never acted upon, that things might be managed better than they were ; the establishment might have been altogether at a stand-still, if Mr Curtis had not been of opinion that the affairs of daily life had better be attended to imperfectly than not at all.

Mrs Lonsdale found Mr Curtis a very useful acquaintance, and many a present of game from the country, and many a ticket for places of public amusement, did she receive from his liberal and good-natured hand. She considered these little obligations quite compensated for by the hope which she was continually holding out to Mrs Curtis, of getting her at some time or other an invitation to one of Mrs

Bolder's evening parties. Mrs Grant found the society of her fellow-lodger fatiguing, and yet amusing; she liked to see her come into the room, but became very tired of her before she quitted it. For some time Mrs Lonsdale's attention was very much occupied in fitting up her drawing-rooms with taste and elegance, so as to be prepared to make the best possible appearance by the time the season commenced; many were the interviews between herself and Mrs Manners before she carried the great point of having new coverings to the sofas. She only prevailed at last by representing the effect likely to be produced upon her dear Lady Crampton by the appearance of the old ones. Several smaller improvements were also effected at the landlady's cost, who made poor Mrs Grant very uncomfortable one afternoon when Eleanor was gone out, by revealing to her her private opinion that she should be a great loser by Mrs Lonsdale, and that it might end in her being obliged to give up the house alto-

gether, for letting lodgings was but a bad trade at the best of times. The idea of there being any prospect of her being obliged to move was a very grievous one to the timid and ailing Mrs Grant, who generally believed what people told her about their affairs, especially if they found her alone.

Mrs George Lonsdale was not quite sure whether she did or did not admire Eleanor Stuart; she had intended to be very patronizing to her before her old friends arrived in Bath and her new ones were made, but she soon found out her mistake, and discovered that from various causes Eleanor's companionship was difficult to be obtained, and that on the days fine enough for Mrs Grant to venture out, she always preferred a dull walk by the side of her wheeled chair to a gay shopping expedition to Milsom Street.

"It looks just as if she knew I wanted to make a convenience of her," she would say to herself, "but she is too young to be sharp

enough to see that. I do n't much like her, and yet I dare say there is a great deal in her ; I shall want people who can talk well at my parties, and I fancy she can if she chooses. I wonder if she can play—I suppose not, as they have no piano down-stairs."

"Do you think you are quite kind to Mrs Lonsdale ?" Mrs Grant would sometimes ask. "Poor thing, she wants a companion, and you always find some excuse when she asks you to go out with her ; it would be better for your health to walk about with her sometimes than to be so much at home with me. Besides, as people sow, they must expect to reap, and if you are not obliging to her now, she will not be ready to take you to parties as I hope she will ; and she hinted something to me about it. You know very well I can never go out of an evening, and she is a good-natured person, and knows nicer people than Mrs Stockton does, who sometimes took you out last year."

After observations like these, Eleanor would

accept Mrs Lonsdale's next invitation to accompany her to choose a vase, or a China card plate, or anything that struck her as necessary to complete her work of adornment, not because she cared to secure her as a *chaperon*, but to satisfy Mrs Grant, whom, on her return, she would find fretful, and tired of her own company, and tormented with a never expressed jealousy lest the society of this gay woman of the world should be preferred to her own; and Eleanor, finding all little accounts of purchases or anecdotes of adventures received with coldness, would become silent and retire within herself to meet those darkening thoughts, whose cause was never acknowledged, but whose existence was ever felt.

CHAPTER V.

“ Form her wisely, she is plastic,
 Needing but a moulding hand;
Make her worthy of her station
 In the honour'd matron band.

“ She is chosen for thy helpmeet,—
 Teach her how to help indeed:
Thou wilt fly to her in sorrow,—
 Fit her for thy time of need.”

“ CERTAINLY women are creatures to be moulded, and happy are those who fall into hands able to mould them into right and useful shapes.”

This was the reflection of Mr Bromley, when,

on paying a visit to the drawing-room to fetch a volume of Pope from the elegant little book-case, he perceived how Flora was occupied. She had placed the writing-table, which was called Eleanor's, close to one of the windows, in order to have the advantage of so much light as could be had on a gloomy frowning day in December, when the afternoon was on the wane, and she was busily employed in filling up several club tickets, referring carefully to a business-like little book, kept open by a paper knife ; when each ticket was finished she would stop, and look in a very critical, scrutinizing manner at her handwriting, and then nibbing her pen, would go on again with a sort of busy frown upon her girlish face, produced by the consciousness that she was very useful indeed. Mr Bromley made no observation ; he was a man of sound judgment, and he knew that an improvement in habits is more likely to be permanent if at first it is left unnoticed, but he looked pleased and satisfied, and instead of

returning immediately to his study, he gave the fire a very gentle stir, and stood before it enjoying the genial blaze.

Mrs Lonsdale was sitting in an easy chair drawn in close to the fender, not looking so happy as she might be, considering that all was going well with her. She was hemming pocket-handkerchiefs, and on her lap was lying a letter taken out of its envelope, at which she had glanced several times in the course of the afternoon.

“ Was there any news of Eleanor in your Bath letter ? ” asked Mr Bromley.

“ No, Mrs George but barely mentions her name. You know she is not a girl likely to suit her, as she is not half sociable enough.”

“ And how does Mrs George Lonsdale like her present quarters ? ”

“ Oh, very much indeed. She says she knows such charming people, and she is so glad she made up her mind to winter in Bath. And it is to be such a season as has not been

known for,—let me see, what does she say ? for she writes with such pale ink that I can scarcely make her letter out—not been known, she says, for fifty years. Yes, it must be fifty, I am sure that is a five.”

“That, I presume, she has heard from her hair-dresser.”

“Oh, dear, no ; everybody says the same thing. Besides, the season is going on now, and she has been to all kinds of delightful parties. She knows Lady Crampton and Mrs Bolder, who she says are the queens of the place ; and she subscribes to the balls, and finds the Master of the Ceremonies such a pleasant, chatty, cordial person ; and she knows intimately two of the stewards, and when she takes girls with her they dance all night, while there are rows sitting down without partners. She is a clever woman, and knows how to get on in the world.”

“A very charming person, no doubt,” said Mr Bromley, politely.

"She asked so very kindly for you, Flora, and sent her love."

"Who, mamma?" asked Flora, looking up with a flushed cheek from her employment.

"*Who?* why, what have you been thinking of? Mrs George Lonsdale, to be sure; surely you have heard what I have been talking about. I wish you would come away from that window, where you must be half frozen on such a day as this."

"But every part of this room is warm," pleaded Flora.

"To be sure it is, my dear," said Mr Bromley, well pleased with the remark. "I flatter myself that since I have had my rooms lined with zinc, they have been proof against

"'Winter and foul weather.'"

"But if you are not cold, I am sure you can't see any longer," persisted Mrs Lonsdale. "You will spoil your eyes in that light."

"Let me just finish this dozen, mamma; I have only four to do."

"Why can't Henry Mordaunt write them out himself? Surely it will be quite time enough for him to make a slave of you when you *are* his wife."

"A *slave*, mamma! He is only teaching me to do good; and to do good, he says, is to be happy."

Mrs Lonsdale made a movement of impatience, and put her Bath letter back into its envelope.

"Do you remember," said Flora, with a puzzled look, appealing to Mr Bromley, "whether it is Betty Cox or Betty Saunders who is dead? Henry said it was one of them, I know, but he forgot to scratch the name out of the book, and I should be *so sorry* to make a mistake."

"I am very sorry that I cannot inform you upon that point: would it not be best to wait until he comes and refer the matter to him?"

But perhaps," he added with a quiet little smile, "he will not be here to-day, as the sky looks threatening for a snow-storm."

Flora looked down with a smile and a bright blush, for she knew now that no weather would keep him from her. The front-door bell was heard at this moment, and Mr Bromley composedly retreated to the complete comfort and quiet of his study. Mrs Lonsdale was not a sort of person to quit her snug place by the fire-side, for any mysteriously important *tête-à-tête* that might have been contemplated by a suitor of whom she was now quite secure; so she remained.

A smile of pleasure lighted up the handsome features of Henry Mordaunt when he entered and saw how Flora was engaged, and his words of loving approbation, breathed in low tones into her ready ear, made her heart dance with delight; she had been long certain of his love, and she was now striving (ah! most laudable ambition of a woman's soul) to

win his respect ; she was sometimes tormented with an unpleasant fear when she recalled the first days of their acquaintance, and remembered the regard, almost amounting to veneration, which he used to show for Eleanor's opinion, so honestly given, even when its purport was to oppose, or even to find fault with him. She thought of the difficult questions in moral duty which he would bring to her to solve ; of any new or startling sentiment which struck him in his reading, of the justice of which he seemed to consider her even more capable of judging than himself. In those days how much had she secretly envied Eleanor, and how delightful had been the triumph, first to her vanity, and then to her heart, when she perceived how his attention became attracted to herself ; and how readily had she encouraged that feeling, which, beginning in a kind of gallant indulgence, had gone on increasing, until it had ended in a devotion which made her very pettishness more powerful than all

the high qualities of her rival ; for a rival she had considered her, and whether she had acted righteously and truly towards her was a question she never stopped to ask herself. She only felt how sweet was the conviction that her charms had triumphed over one by many thought so superior ; and, besides, why should Eleanor be thought of in the matter ?—she, so indifferent and so cold, she had either never felt, or she would easily forget. But Henry must forget too ; he must never fancy for a moment that Eleanor could have helped him better than she could, and so she was following where he led, and ready to try to carry out what he planned. She could not originate or correct, but she could admire, and that perhaps will do as well for you, Henry Mordaunt, as for many other men ; only have a care to keep as right as you can, for, should you chance to stumble, there will be no one to hold you up.

* * * * *

“Very neat indeed, dearest, very neat,” and Henry Mordaunt looked complacently at the handwriting on one of the tickets. “But excuse me, love, I think you have made a little mistake; I fancy it ought to be 13*s.* 6*d.* for this, and you have put 12*s.* 4*d.*”

“Oh, dear, what a pity, so it ought; I must have looked twice at the bottom of the same page. I must have another ticket and write it all over again.”

“No, love, no, I won’t hear of your taking so much trouble—I can rectify it in a moment,” and he took out his penknife and gently scratched out the wrong figures; “now you can easily put in the 13*s.* 6*d.*”

“No, I can’t, it will blot and run; I can never write on a place where there has been scratching out.”

“It is tiresome, but I can do it if you will lend me your pen.”

Flora handed it to him, but looked as if she thought it rather unkind of him to have found

out the mistake at all, for those new to an employment are more touchy as to error than the more experienced. As Henry did not raise his eyes, he did not perceive the expression of hers ; a mistake in figures he justly considered of the greatest moment in his dealings with the poor, and he was very carefully making the required alteration.

“ A pretty sort of conversation for an engaged couple,” soliloquized Mrs Lonsdale, who from her arm-chair was peering at the lovers as curiously as the rabbit in Longfellow’s *Hia-watha* ; and then she contrasted the real talk of the man before her, with all the imaginary fine speeches of an Hon. Frederick Dillon, the beau *par excellence* of Bath, about whom Mrs George Lonsdale had said so much in her letter of that morning. She had stated that he had heard from his sister, who had heard from her cousin, who had been at school with Flora, of the latter’s great beauty, and he had a curiosity to see her, and therefore Mrs Lons-

dale had been out of temper all day, because she fancied that her daughter might have been thrown away by being allowed to engage herself so early to the first man who came forward. "The Hon. Mrs Frederick Dillon, what a sound that would have had!" for she could very soon jump from a first idea to its complete realization; "and what a humdrum life she will have with this man; why, there he is looking into another ticket, as if he expected her to be as correct as a lawyer's clerk. I dare say he will bring flannel and calico for her to measure off next week."

"Why are you looking at those?" asked Flora, for Henry's eyes were fixed upon several tickets which she had laid in order upon the table to dry, for she had rejected blotting paper, as she liked the writing to look nice and black.

"Do n't you remember, dearest, that I told you I had not added the per-centage to the two last pages? and you said you would

do it for me. We can afford this year 3*d.* in the shilling."

"Dear, dear, I forgot all about that," said Flora, looking ready to cry, "but you ought to have done it yourself. How should I know how to put per-centage?"

"My love," returned he, looking annoyed, "I offered to do it, but you said you would rather have it left, and that you would like to help me in everything." Then he took up the cards one by one, and went carefully on with that process of erasing which Flora considered so disagreeable; and then, referring to the book, he began adding the per-centage, without once looking up until he had finished, and then he wrote the right sum upon each card, while Flora sat pouting her rosy lips and feeling ill used.

"It is not at all difficult, I assure you," he said when he had done. "You could do it in a moment. Look here, you have only to add 3*d.* for each shilling, 1½*d.* for any 6*d.* that is left,

and $\frac{3}{4}d.$ if there is a $3d.$ As, for instance, here are $12s. 9d.$ Twelve threepences are three shillings, then the three half-pence for the sixpence, and the three farthings for the threepence, make two-pence farthing, and when you add this with the three shillings to the $12s. 9d.$ you have $15s. 11\frac{1}{4}d.$ You see it is quite easy. You could do it another time." And then he raised his eyes—but to behold what? Flora in tears!

"My sweetest love!" he exclaimed, with the deepest concern, "what *can* I have said to hurt you?"

But Flora continued to weep, and to assert in broken sentences that she could do nothing to please him; that he was not satisfied; that he never would be; that all her pains had been entirely thrown away, and that she never again would have anything to do with that nasty old clothing club."

"Quite right," thought Mrs Lonsdale, who, if she had had any consideration, would at this

juncture have left the room. No man likes to acknowledge himself in the wrong even when he is so ; and as Henry Mordaunt felt that he had been right, he found it rather difficult to soothe Flora, and yet avoid any mortifying confession of error on his own part. The work of conciliation would certainly have been easier had not that starched upright figure of Mrs Lonsdale remained motionless in the easy chair. He was vexed, but not deeply wounded, as Eleanor had had the power to wound, when a few of her words had left a sting for hours ; he was not angry with his dearly-loved Flora, only a little disappointed that she should be angry at such a trifle. He was silent, and looked much more dignified than he had intended. This had a better effect than words. Flora looked deprecatingly at him, and gave an April smile through her tears.

“Dearest,” said he, in a tone too low to be caught by the acutely-listening ear of Mrs Lonsdale, “will you come out with me?”

Though the air is winterly it is bracing, and it will do you good, for you have been working too hard ; I am so vexed that you have been tiring yourself for me."

Flora rose with the quickness of a child when called to its best-loved sport.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs Lonsdale in a sharp, unpleasant voice ; for when she saw Flora flying off like a glad, fluttering bird, evidently at his bidding, she knew that the quarrel was at an end ; and (oh, mother ! mother ! what are you thinking of ?) she was *disappointed*.

"Only for a little walk, dear mamma."

"But you ought not to be out now, it is too late and too cold."

"The avenue is quite sheltered, and the air will do her good," interposed Henry Mordaunt, in that decided mannish manner which women do not often resist.

Mrs Lonsdale said no more, and Flora made

her escape before she could receive any more decided prohibition.

* * * * *

It was a gloomy afternoon, and leaden clouds were in the sky, all collected densely together, giving to the eye no clear outline or decided form; they were charged with the coming snow; the bleak wind was driving before it the few withered leaves, which, like frail but tenacious hopes, had clung even until mid-winter to the branches they had once so beautified; the wintry sun only showed itself like a dull red ball in the dark sky, emitting no bright, dazzling rays; the eye could look full into its cheerless face, and not be dimmed; the shrubs look shrunk and smaller from the cold, and here and there upon the twigs a sparrow could be seen, making as large as possible its protecting cloak of feathers, and looking at once spiritless and patient. It was not a day to tempt abroad the lovers of the

genial fire-side, when they have no imperative call to take them out of doors, but to Flora it was bright enough ; for her the face of nature, all frowning as it was, could wear no gloom ; she leaned upon the protecting arm, so strong, she thought, and perfect, which was to guard her in safety through all the journey of her life. She listened to the words of love and tenderness and soothing, first used only to tranquillise her and make her feel satisfied with herself and him who breathed them ; and then, taking up a strain of encouragement and hope, making her forget all real and fancied deficiency, and to believe, oh ! how fully and how gladly his fond assurance of how every labour would be lightened for him when she should come to his home to share it. And then, when the large stable clock, that could be heard all over the grounds, warned them that it was time to go in, how reluctantly they turned towards the house ; and perhaps a little irritated by the quick flight of time, Henry

Mordaunt took up a tone of complaint, and remarked, as he had often done, on what he considered Mrs Lonsdale's unreasonable determination that their marriage should not take place until after Flora's next birthday. He expressed himself now more impatiently than before, and again he asserted the fact, which had been repeated so many times over, that there was no reason for delay, not even the shadow of one. And Flora was silent, and let him talk on just as much as he liked ; and when they entered the hall, she ran up to her room to prepare for dinner, feeling that her cup of earthly happiness was full even to the brim.

CHAPTER VI.

"Rouse thy weak soul, appease thy moan,
Soon are the clouds of sorrow gone."—WARTON.

It was what people who accosted each other in the streets called regular old-fashioned Christmas weather. A sharp frost had set in, hardening the snow which already lay upon the ground; a sense of still stronger health braced those robust ones who boldly went forth to meet the weather, as they would a gallant enemy, openly face to face, and a still more overpowering dread of the cold came to those who from sickness or indolence crept

closer and closer to their own fire-sides, neglecting that exercise which the poet, who neglected it too, pronounced to be the vital principle of health.

Wrapped closely in her large warm shawl of shepherd's plaid, her face covered by a thick Shetland veil, Eleanor went out on the morning of Christmas Eve, and took her customary way to the market-place. The duty which she had imposed upon herself of catering for her aunt's uncertain appetite, and at the same time carefully managing to suit her slender income, had become a tangible motive for exertion salutary and pleasant, as every occupation is sure to be which is willingly undertaken for a good, practical end. It struck her as strange on this day, as her feet with light but cautious tread passed along the slippery streets, that this morning walk should be the one thing that gave a redeeming impress of activity to the whole course of days, in which time seemed frittered away in an objectless, un-

meaning manner. One day so like another; first the solitary breakfast, and the frequent visits to Mrs Grant's room, to attend to her many little wants, to substitute cocoa for the scarcely-tasted cup of tea, or tea for the cocoa; to have requests given at the bed-side, and countermanded before she reached the door; then the debate as to the time of rising, and the assistance required during her toilette, which prevented any regular occupation; then the difficulty in making up her mind as to what she wanted in the town before Eleanor started; then followed the walk itself, from which Eleanor would return to find some troublesome intimate friend, established early by the fire in the most comfortable chair, to have a good chat before other visitors could be expected, and who would depart just before the early dinner; after which would come a succession of double knocks, by far the greater number for Mrs George Lonsdale up-stairs, but a sufficient supply would be shown into the sitting-

room down-stairs, to fill the afternoon with the favourite topics of the town, to weary Eleanor with repeated editions of the same story, or to trouble her with uncharitable remarks. Amongst these there were scarcely any in whose society Eleanor could find improvement or pleasure, the fault being partly theirs and partly her own. They were principally old ladies of a gossiping turn of mind, but they had their good traits, and many a fine quality too, which could be discovered by those who have a faith and trust in others. The visitors would depart, and then would come tea, to be followed by an evening, pleasant or not, according to the nerves and feelings of Mrs Grant. They had no piano, and therefore Eleanor was debarred from her favourite amusement; she did not regret it now, for she felt that she had not the old inclination for music, but without her being aware of it, the want of it was adding materially to the dreary monotony which was creeping over

her life. During the winter weather Mrs Grant would not venture out, and being in one room wearied her, and her peevishness was daily increasing. It added to Eleanor's depression, which again reacted upon it, and so, without any positive evil to endure, there was much that was unhappy, much too that was wrong.

Where were those dreams of widely-extended usefulness which had appeared so bright and so possible in the glowing summer hours of Carstone? Then, was not life too short for beneficence? Was not the very heart expanded with its larger views of charity, and good-will universal? Seemed not time the most precious talent committed to mortal keeping? Was not leisure the golden opportunity for the study of all elegant and refining arts, or for the constantly progressing solid improvement of the mind, which, while it refreshed the memory of knowledge already acquired, must ever be adding richly to its stores? What had kindled all this

enthusiasm,—and what had extinguished it? Did it spring from earthly hope, and did it perish with it? Question of searching and awful import, receive and answer it, poor troubled soul, passing through a crisis of moral life or death, and be thankful with a profound and never-ending thankfulness, if the blast has blown upon your fair-seeming edifice in time to show you that it was built upon the sand, that those defences, which in the eyes of men were towers of strength, could stand no real assault; and then begin anew, having for your foundation the solid rock, against which the wildest waves of anguish shall dash in vain.

* * * * *

Deep in thought as Eleanor had been when she had first encountered the frosty morning air, by degrees her attention became awakened to the bustling, active appearance which everything about her wore, when she had left the comparative quiet of the Circus and Gay street

behind her; what a look of cheerfulness and abundance was over the fine old city; how well stocked were the butchers' stalls with joints larger and fatter than can ever be seen at any other season; how full of business were the grocers' shops; how benignant and smiling were the shopmen as they untiringly weighed out to numerous customers fruit so fine that it looked as if it had been especially imported for Christmas puddings. What cordiality was in every greeting! What indulgence was granted to every mistake; and what appreciation given to the rough, honest jocularly of hale, hearty countrymen, with complexions like ruddy autumn apples, who, with strong baskets over their arms, had come into Bath to get supplies for their wives at home. What a happy hurry everybody was in, preparing for the universal holiday, the best feast of all the year, when the prosperous rejoice in the full joy of the earth, and the sorrowful, rejoicing, look beyond it.

Saddened and deeply humbled as had been

the mood in which Eleanor left home, a something of the general spirit became infused into her, and with a cheerfulness to which she had long been a stranger, she passed by the Lion and entered the market, where many a magnificent sirloin, and many a well-fed turkey, already appropriated, was ticketed for its discerning purchaser, who had come early to have the best choice where so much was good. Abundant was the supply of everything in fish, and flesh, and fowl; and great the demand, from purchasers varying in character from the simple, unsuspecting beings who believe that everything is good and cheap when they are told that it is so, to those sharp, shrewd individuals who walk up to a stall armed with their full-collected powers, as if they were about to cross-examine a witness of doubtful veracity. Here and there the eye rested on the deep, glossy green and bright red of the holly, on the dark branch of the sombre yew, or on the pearly berry of the mistletoe.

Eleanor stood for a short time to take a general survey of a scene so animated, and then she went on to a poulterer's, to look for a pheasant, for Mrs Grant had decided against all precedent that her Christmas dinner should consist only of game and a tapioca pudding; roast beef, plum pudding, or mince pie, or even turkey, she declared against; as she said the very sight of them would make her melancholy, and bring back reminiscences of the past, for which she felt herself this year peculiarly unfitted; besides, she observed that there would be a kind of mockery of former merriment in having Christmas fare with only two persons, and those not in the best of spirits, to share it. These observations had not added to Eleanor's cheerfulness before she set forth, but now she only thought of making the best selection for the appointed dinner, and a feeling almost akin to amusement arose in her mind when she reflected on Mrs Grant's singular choice. Another Christmas, and how would it be? Would

things around her be brighter? would her spirit have recovered its tone? The very question did her good, for, like the first faint streak of light, it was the harbinger of the coming day.

“Not a better bird, ma’am, in all Bath!” exclaimed the poulterer, with that entire confidence which often insures success, at the same time looking from the pheasant to Eleanor with a most deprecating expression, which seemed to add, “Do not, for the sake of your own character for discernment, do not, in the commonest justice, deny it.”

“I agree with you,” said Eleanor, with a gentle, amused smile. “I will take it.”

“Thank you, ma’am, thank you; there is a pleasure in serving you, for you do know good from bad.”

She was just receiving the change into her delicately gloved hand, when she heard herself accosted from behind.

“Miss Stuart, Miss Stuart, who would have thought of seeing you here?” cried Mr Curtis.

with great cordiality. "Well done; well done! Why, I thought all the ladies in Bath were at home this morning shivering and shaking, and rubbing their fingers, and for ever ringing the bell to have the fire made up."

"Yet it is a fine bracing morning," returned Eleanor.

"To be sure it is, and everybody ought to be out, but that is what I can't hammer into Mrs Curtis."

"I hope she is well?"

"Why, pretty well, she is nursing herself for the Pump-Room Grand Oratorio, as they call it, but I am not going. And then in the evening we are going to the Rooms,—music enough, I should say, for one blessed day! But come, have you made all your purchases? for if you have you must allow me the honour of escorting you round the market. Let us go and look at all the fine things; I am fond of a market myself, and so I suppose are you, or you would n't be here. There, James, you may go

home now," he said, turning to the tiger, who was following him with a huge basket. "I am up to a thing or two," he added to Eleanor when James had departed. "They *say*—I do n't want to be uncharitable, but they *do* say that sometimes you may choose your own joint, or whatever it is, and get another sent instead of it, so I bring the boy to make sure, and save the people trouble into the bargain. Only think what a nuisance, to be carving away at a tough thing, when you know you looked out a tender one, and to have your wife begging you in a pitiful voice to turn the joint and try if it is better under. What a situation for a man like me to be placed in, when I flatter myself that I know good meat from bad, almost as well as if I had been born, I should say bred, a butcher."

"Of course it would ; to take pains for any object, and after all to fail, is exceedingly mortifying."

"It is ; and there are more quarrels between

married people at dinner than in all the rest of the day put together. Remember that, Miss Stuart, and always choose things well yourself, or be satisfied when your husband chooses them. Do n't be making excuses about the cook, but see into everything with your own eyes if you want to live happily."

Having delivered this useful advice, Mr Curtis gallantly offered Eleanor his arm to make the tour of the market.

"First of all, have you made all your purchases?"

"I have, thank you," replied Eleanor, determined to conceal their nature, lest Mrs Grant's departure from established rules should cause her Christmas dinner to be made a matter of comment amongst her acquaintances, first remarked upon for its singularity, and then perhaps whispered as a sign of incipient insanity—for the moral liberty of the subject, even in small matters, is not invariably ceded in Bath.

"What a glorious baron of beef!" ex-

claimed Mr Curtis, "fit for the Corporation of London. Where is this going to, I wonder?"

"I should think it must be intended for some public dinner."

"So it must, so it must. Look there! did you ever see such a splendid mistletoe? Is Somerset famous for it?"

"I am not sure, but it is probable, for I know that it flourishes very much in the woods of Wiltshire."

"And those being so near, you think it may abound as much in this county. Well, that may be, and it may not be."

"A very safe opinion to arrive at."

"Well, I think for my part that Bath has the best market I have seen anywhere. You can get anything you want, and at a reasonable price too. Look at the meat, look at the poultry, look at the vegetables, and especially look at the fish. You can't do better at the sea-side, not half so well. Do you see that old lady, marching along with her servant behind

her? How she tosses her head, and how scornful she looks when she is told the price of anything, as if to say, 'I know better, I am an old hand, take me in if you can.' I have a good look at her every morning,—who is she?"

"Mrs Festing, a lady of the old school, and a capital housekeeper I have been told."

"So I should think. I dare say now that she saves pounds and pounds a year to her husband, by going about and looking for things herself, as every sensible woman ought to do. That is the only way of finding out where the best articles are to be had. But you don't need this advice, you are a wise young lady, and don't shrink back like a snail into its shell at the sight of a bit of snow or a drop of rain. A lucky man your husband will be, but I beg your pardon, I won't say another word about that, only I shall be very glad some day to shake him heartily by the hand, and tell him what a treasure he has secured. What capital berried holly, I really think it is better than

what I bought just now. I shall have the dining-room well trimmed up, but Mrs Curtis will only allow one little sprig in the drawing-room."

"That reminds me that I have not any," said Eleanor.

"Now is your time then, now is your time."

"Yes, Sir," said the owner of the stall, now on the alert, "very true, Sir, you won't get better holly all over the market, my lady,—*there*," and she triumphantly held out two or three sprigs at arms-length, "all that for sixpence!"

"All that for what?" retorted Mr Curtis; "if you get twopence for it you may call yourself a lucky woman."

"*Sir!*" and in her indignation she drew herself up, until her whole frame looked as rigid as if it were made of cast-iron. "Nobody as saw the berries on that holly would grudge sixpence for it."

"But we do, my good woman," returned Mr Curtis, nodding his head to her and passing on.

"Come, my lady, 'tis throwing it away, but I'll say threepence for it."

Eleanor checked the speed of her resolute escort, and possessed herself of the holly at that price, allowing to him, afterwards, full liberty to impress upon her the fact that she had given a penny too much for it. He was explaining to her with considerable energy that it is the duty of everybody, upon public grounds, to be firm in refusing to give more than a fair value for everything, when his observations were brought to a sudden close by his stepping on a piece of orange peel, which nearly threw him down.

"What is the use of a mayor,—what is the use of a corporation,—what is the use of policemen who walk about the streets with their eyes shut? Nobody's life is safe, nobody's limbs are safe. Call this a well-conducted city!! I will write to the Bath Chronicle, I certainly will. You will see my letter next week, headed '*Intolerable nuisance.*' I am

serious, I really am." And with a sort of humane fierceness the angry Mr Curtis picked up the peel and threw it into a basket of refuse, where it could no longer endanger the public safety.

"If you could prevent such carelessness, you would be doing a great service to the place."

"I know I should, and the letter shall certainly be written. Let me see—how shall I begin?"

"Sir,—Through the medium of your powerful and widely-circulated journal— No, no, that wo n't do, that's more like writing to the *Times*.

"Sir,—Through the medium of your efficient and well-conducted journal,—that will do, wo n't it?"

"Admirably."

"Sir,—Through the medium of your efficient and well-conducted journal, I beg to bring before you the notice of— of what, Miss Stuart? I was going to say of the public, but the public must know the nuisance a great deal too well

already. Ah, I have it,—before the notice of the authorities,—that, you see, is a safe expression, that can't give offence to anybody in particular,—before the notice of the authorities of this city, the malicious and intolerable—”

“Rather strong,” suggested Eleanor.

“Not a bit of it, not a bit too strong, ladies are always too mild on these occasions. You must be strong, or you do no good. I tell you what I will do, I will go home and write the letter, and when it is published in the *Chronicle*, I will bring it to you for your opinion.”

“That will be by far the best plan,” returned Eleanor, “and now I think I must say good morning, as I am going at once home, and you said you had business in Argyle Street.”

“So I have—good-bye—glad to have met you, my kind regards to Mrs Grant; tell her I shall drop in some time to-morrow, to wish her a merry Christmas.”

And he went on his way, and Eleanor, amused and refreshed, returned to Rivers Street.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Evil darkness hath been o’er me,
Evil of the heart and mind ;
Now my better self awaketh,
For the inward light hath shined.

“ And that inward light hath shown me
Selfish sorrow turns to sin ;
So I rise to cast it from me,
And a nobler life begin.”

“ ONLY think how unfortunate ; a visit could not have been worse timed ! ”

These were Mrs Grant’s first words to Eleanor when she had taken off her bonnet and shawl, and entered the room invigorated by her frosty morning walk.

“ Why, who has been here then, and how could a visit be ill-timed when you are always so ready to receive anybody ? ”

“ That ’s the very thing, Eleanor, that makes it all the more annoying. I always am ready I know, more ready in my one small room than many people are with a large house at their command ; but this morning, of all others, I happened not to be—you know I couldn’t eat a bit of breakfast, but my appetite seemed to come after you went out, so I had up the tea-pot and a cup and saucer, and a little plate of buttered toast ; and as it was so cold I wrapped my old red shawl round me, and sat down with my feet on the fender to try and eat a bit. Of course I expected nobody so early, on such a miserable, snowy, frosty morning ; and so I ventured to put my old warm dress before the fire to air, as I never can trust anything down-stairs ; I am sure to take cold if I do ; and, what is worse, I found out after that one of the sleeves had a hole in it. And the bed-

room door was wide open, for I intended, as soon as I had had my tea, to go in and take off my shawl and put on my other cap. Well, what do you think? Without coming to me first and bringing his card,—as I have told her a hundred times she ought to do,—that stupid owl of a Mary threw open the door and announced—who do you think?”

“I can’t guess, do tell me,” said Eleanor, raised to a pitch of uncomfortable curiosity as to who the visitor might be, who had appeared under circumstances so untoward.

“Sir Allan Mountjoy!”

“Indeed, how sorry I am that I was not at home to see him.”

“And so am I indeed, for you would have had your wits about you, and shut the bedroom door, and put the dress from the fire before he had even time to see it.”

“Oh, don’t tease yourself about that any more. I really think he is the last man in the world to notice such things; and as for a hole,

he would scarcely see it if you pointed it out to him."

"Do you really think so?" said Mrs Grant, a little relieved. "But you may fancy what an awkward meeting it was, for I had never seen the man before in my life; and since I have been so poorly I can't pass off things as I could when I was strong; so I felt caught, and he looked nervous, and there was the door standing wide open, and knowing I should be a long time getting to it with this rheumatic affection in my limbs, I looked at it, feeling somehow as if I were paralysed, when suddenly up he jumped and went and shut it himself."

Eleanor could not suppress a smile.

"Then I managed to turn the chair away from the fire, and he came back and sat down."

"And then I suppose you got on very well?"

"No, we did not, for I felt shaky, and could not recover myself; and he said nothing, but

looked straight into the fire. I noticed then what a curious, shaggy pair of trousers he had on, and how very much his hair wanted cutting."

Eleanor smiled again, quite one of her old smiles.

"And after that what passed?"

"He turned round with a sudden jerk that startled me, and asked for you. I told him you were out, and then he said something about the snow and the cold, but my deafness had come on, with that uncomfortable singing sound in my ears that you know I suffered so much from last spring, during the easterly winds; and I really could not make out what he said. I am sure, Eleanor, I am not fit to be left, for I do n't feel up to receiving anybody, but just my old friends that I do n't care anything about. How unfortunate it was, to be sure, that you happened to be out of the way,—I fancy you always are at the most inconvenient times."

“Could you make out what had brought him to Bath?”

“Why, he said something about an old man who had been very kind to him on the Continent ; and, as far as I could hear, he came to Bath to look out lodgings for him, on account of the baths, I suppose. He asked me to recommend some, but I said that I rarely stirred out, and knew so little about the place, but that if you had been at home you could have told him of several.”

“I suppose he did not stay long?”

“No, he was in a hurry about the lodgings and about the train, and he said he was so sorry not to meet with you, and I was to tell you something about Mountjoy and Christmas Day that you would be pleased to hear ; but I don't know exactly what the message was, for he gave it in such a low tone. And then he shook hands with me very warmly indeed, and went off, and he got to the front door, I am sure, before Mary could have time to reach it ;

and he had not been gone a half a minute before I remembered those very nice lodgings on the South Parade, that you are so anxious to get well let on account of the poor widow who owns them. They would have been exactly the thing for an invalid; warm and sunny, and clean and comfortable, and conveniently near the baths. Really, Eleanor, what a pity it was you were out. I am so vexed, I shall not recover myself all day. He must have had such a romantic idea of all your friends, and to think of my receiving him in such a way. How I wish, now, I had been more kind to him, and said I was very glad to see him, and I hoped he would come again. I know that a good welcome is everything, but my poor nerves would not let me give it: now it is all over with me, and I shall be upset for the day."

Mary entered to lay the cloth, and Mrs Grant leant back in her chair with her hands clasped, looking moodily into the fire; she

had not even spirit enough to scold Mary for her extreme bad management, for it seemed to her at the time that the evil of the morning had been so great that it could not be compensated for by any future reforms.

Eleanor in vain tried during dinner to make her forget the image of the ill-received Allan Mountjoy. She could not induce her to talk of anything else, or even of him. She just roused herself to give Mary a sharp admonition to draw down the blinds carefully, as Lady Crampton's carriage drove up to the door, and being quite satisfied that the tall footman could not contemplate her dinner table from his commanding position, she relapsed into silence. Eleanor having seen her settled for her afternoon's nap, and hoping that to-day it might not be disturbed, left her; and having ascertained that Mrs George Lonsdale had gone out with Lady Crampton, she went to the drawing-room for the first time to avail herself of the often-repeated offer of the use of

the piano. She resolved to be very attentive to every double knock, that she might be able immediately to go down and aid Mrs Grant in the reception of any other visitor. None, however, arrived, which was a very rare occurrence, and the afternoon wore away in unwonted quietness. People were probably occupied at the Pump-Room, or kept away by the weather. Eleanor was grateful for the cause of their absence, whatever it might be; and she felt that calmness and relief stealing over her which solitude, as an anodyne to the spirit, sometimes brings. She sat for a short time with the piano open before her, without touching its keys; the cheerful fire was glowing brightly, and the arrangement of the room was pleasant to the eye; a few flowers were well arranged in a vase upon the table, and some choice chrysanthemums looked bright and cheerful in a tasteful stand near the centre window. As Eleanor sat and thought, it seemed as though the clouds were gradually

passing away, and that her dormant interest in life was shaking off its prolonged unhealthy slumber. At last she began to play, at first slowly and uncertainly, and as a kind of accompaniment to her own changing thoughts, and then by degrees came back to the memory many a well-known melody, until at length, both soothed and absorbed, she played on with a zest which made her forget everything that could sadden or depress; she scarcely noticed when the clock struck four, or perceived the deepening shades of the early misty twilight. The resounding rap of Lady Crampton's footman was heard in every corner of the house; and then she rose, and closing the instrument with a grateful feeling, as if it were a living thing, and she was thanking it for the pleasure it had given her, she went down-stairs without coming in contact with Mrs Lonsdale, who was exchanging some last words in the carriage with her dear Lady Crampton.

“I am glad you have been playing, for I

thought you would forget all your music," said Mrs Grant, upon whom solitude seemed to have had a better effect than usual, for she was looking composed and almost cheerful.

Eleanor sat down on the other side of the fire, and they began talking together, for it was too dark for occupation, and too early for lights.

A familiar tap was heard at the door, and Mrs George Lonsdale entered.

"How nice and cosy you look," she said; "I am come to have a pleasant chat with you till my dinner is ready."

And down she sat, with that friendly look of interest on her face which she always wore to those whom she was addressing for the time.

"I have been enjoying your beautiful piano," observed Eleanor.

"Good girl, good girl, you ought to practise every day; music is the best of all accomplishments, for it helps so much to make a

party go off well, and it makes a girl noticed in a room. Nothing is so stupid as to see girls retiring into a corner, and doing nothing all the evening. But, my dear Miss Stuart, you *ought* to have been at the Pump-Room this afternoon ; I should have sent down for you, when dear Lady Crampton called (poor old soul, she really hardly knows how to get about without me now), but I knew you must be dining, and that you would have no time to dress, for it would not do to be late, every seat was caught up as it was. Two gentlemen, such remarkably elegant men, my dear, who knew Lady Crampton very well, got up immediately and gave up their chairs to us, and so, poor creatures, they were obliged to stand all the time."

"Had you good music?" asked Mrs Grant.

"Very fair indeed, really very fair ; some performers up from Bristol. The train was late, so there was a great fright amongst the musicians, but at last the singers arrived, and one

of them sang something very beautifully,—let me see, what was it?—oh, ‘The Last Man;’ Mr Dillon shut his eyes in that amusing way of his, and said that it was not scriptural. You ought to have been there, my dear, to have argued the point with him; I think he begins to get a little tired of the girls with nothing in them, who are always courting him so much.”

“So would any man, I should think,” said Mrs Grant.

“Yes, indeed, you are quite right; what do you think the conceited thing said to me one day? Why, that the reason he is so fond of deer-stalking is, that you have the variety of running after something that won’t run after you.”

“I should like to make his acquaintance,” said Eleanor, smiling.

“For shame, now, after hearing that bad speech! If you had been with us to-day, I should have introduced him to you, he

would be charmed with you ; don't look so doubtful, I am sure of it. But, above all, I should have had such a chance of introducing you to Mrs Bolder, who was sitting next us, and who was in what was for her quite a good humour. What a thing it would have been, for then I might have got you an invitation to her very select Twelfth Night party ; I really was so vexed about it, that I could not properly listen to 'The Last Man.' ”

Eleanor was glad that the faint light concealed the look of contemptuous incredulity with which Mrs Grant was receiving this expression of regret, for she had long been a sceptic as to the fine things their fashionable friend so nearly might have done for Eleanor, and yet somehow never did.

A very unnecessary rattling of cups and saucers here preceded Mary's entrance with the tea.

“ Now then, good-bye,” said Mrs George Lonsdale, rising ; “ I really wish I were going

to have tea instead of dinner, for that close Pump-Room has taken away my appetite, and I have to go through more music in the evening, for Mr and Mrs Curtis would not allow me to say nay to their wish that I should go with them to the Assembly Rooms ; and really when a man goes to the trouble of getting a ticket in the hope of one's going, it is too bearish to refuse, though I have such a rack-ing headache, that I would rather, ten times rather, stay at home. Shall I send your loves to Carstone ? for I must finish a letter I began this morning to Louisa, to beg her to send poor little Flora for a change to me, before she gets chained down for life ; shall I wish them a merry Christmas for you ? ”

“ If you please,” said Mrs Grant, but Eleanor gave no reply.

“ I have asked her for a fortnight, and then you see, if she gets on here, and enjoys herself, I can easily ask her to lengthen her stay ; I have no notion of a young girl settling down

before she has seen anything of the world. If she does, what a tame companion she must make for her husband; and what a Solomon she must think him to be, and not dare to say that black is black and white is white till he tells her she may."

"No great harm in that," returned Mrs Grant, "if she has a sensible man to guide her."

Eleanor still was silent.

"Jealous, jealous, jealous," repeated Mrs George Lonsdale, to herself, as she went upstairs to consult with her maid about her dress for the concert.

* * * *

Was it jealousy—was it envy—was it either of the degrading passions of our poor fallen nature? Was it even thought of self, awakened by what had passed, that sent the deep, rich colour to the delicate cheek, the almost feverish brightness to the large dark eyes, as Eleanor in silence prepared the tea? No! as "a strong

man armed," every better feeling had risen up at once to answer a decided and all-important call. With the quickness of a discerning mind, with the power of a clear understanding, and with the tender compassion of a womanly heart,—in a moment had flashed upon her the danger, the temptations, the unhappiness which threatened Flora. She might exaggerate, probably she did, but in such exaggeration there was safety. She considered that peril hung over another, and that other one whom she had envied as the embittered, disappointed heart of a proud woman alone can envy, and she would do her utmost, her very utmost to save her, and to preserve to her intact the blessings of a lot, happy as aught could be imagined on this side Paradise; and in that thought, the iron chain that had fast bound her own spirit was broken, and for every noble effort she was free.

"Eleanor, my dear, how very well you are looking to-night. How that rich claret me-

rino becomes you. I am so glad you chose it."

Eleanor only smiled kindly in reply, for her heart was very full.

When tea was over and removed, Eleanor brought the book which Mrs Grant was reading, and placed it before her, with her spectacles, and put the lamp at the most convenient distance, and then she took out her writing case. Mrs Grant did not always choose to understand when she did not wish to be interrupted; but this night she did, and she took up the book, and soon appeared to be occupied entirely with it, though now and then she cast an admiring glance at the face opposite to her. "Talk of beauties," she said to herself, "how Eleanor might outshine them all if she chose, if she would only be herself, and not be under such a cloud."

In entire confidence, and with the earnest eloquence of powerfully-excited feeling, Eleanor was writing to Mr Bromley as to the only

one upon whom her view of the case was likely to have the slightest effect ; she gave, without the least reserve, her opinion of Mrs George Lonsdale's character, and her impression of the dangers of Bath society to a disposition so impressionable as Flora's. She spoke of her beauty, her great inexperience, and the little power she would bring with her for resisting flattery, that most insidious of all snares to an unstable mind. She begged him, for Henry Mordaunt's sake and for Flora's, to do all that was possible to get this invitation declined ; and to keep Flora in safe and happy retirement, not allowing her to meet the temptations of the world, until she should be shielded by a husband's protection and authority. She wrote all that she thought, well knowing that she would not be misunderstood, and that if her fears had overdrawn or exaggerated in aught, all would be set right for her by the calm, clear judgment to which she was appealing.

CHAPTER VIII.

“One who calls herself a mother ;
A name she little merits.”—ELECTRA.

THE very successful new patent grate in the dining-room at Carstone Rectory, shaped like the bright shield of some friendly genius, was glowing with heat and light, and aiding the ample crimson curtains, so carefully and closely drawn, in giving a depth of rich, warm colouring to the whole apartment ; that pertinacious intruder, a draught, was completely excluded by double doors and well-fitting window-

frames protected by the most perfect shutters. A soft carpet, in which colours suited to the season were blended with Eastern skill, covered the floor, and upon the table was a cloth of a tasteful pattern in black and crimson ; for in winter Mr Bromley never permitted the sight of cold, polished mahogany, and upon this cloth was placed a dessert of dried fruits, walnuts, and medlars. Close to Mr Bromley's elbow was a decanter of his prime old port ; and he looked so snug and warm and comfortable, that it seemed as if the bitter and piercing cold, which was visiting the land with more than usual severity, was to him a kind of abstract idea, a thing that existed, but was not felt.

Opposite to him sat Mrs Lonsdale, peeling walnuts in a quick fidgety manner, not very well suited to an occupation which a little taxes the patience. She was wishing that her brother would resume the conversation, in which a pause had occurred, but he did not look in-

clined to do so; he was quietly enjoying his wine and leaving the initiative to her.

Mrs Lonsdale was feeling very uncomfortable, as people always do when they are determined to act as they please, and yet cannot be satisfied unless others agree with them.

Mr Bromley was thinking of Bath and of Eleanor.

“Noble girl, noble girl!” he said to himself, “and yet I think she exaggerates a little, which women are very prone to do; and yet perhaps, knowing their own sex so well, they may perceive dangers which we do not. From what she says one would suppose that to be a beauty, and to be in Bath, must be certain destruction. No, not to be simply a beauty, but a beauty of Flora’s particular temperament. She reasons well, yet surely these are practical matter-of-fact days; incense is not offered at woman’s shrine now as it was in the days of Sacharissa. Very true, but

smaller doses of flattery now may accomplish what it required very large ones to do then, because now the constitution is not inured to it; it is with the mind as with the body. But Flora may not take so very much after all. Nelly rates her attractions all the more highly because they are different from her own; that is woman all over. Well, it would certainly be safer and better not to unsettle Flora by letting her go, but it would be absurd to make the question of her spending a fortnight with her aunt a matter of serious dispute. Eleanor overlooks the very strong talisman she carries with her; still, for all that, I will keep to the safe side, and say all that reasonably can be urged to induce Louisa to "let well alone."

All this while Mrs Lonsdale was impatiently eating bits of walnut before they were thoroughly peeled, and shaking her foot backwards and forwards, which expression of feeling, taking place under shelter of the long table-cloth,

could not annoy her brother's fastidious eye. In a trial of silence, woman, as a general rule, succumbs.

Mrs Lonsdale spoke, not exactly caring in what way she approached the subject, so that it was approached.

"He is going out himself; why should Flora stay at home?"

"He is going on his annual visits to his relatives, which I suppose he considers it would be peculiarly unkind this year to omit."

"And Flora is asked to visit *her* relative, and in such a very warm, pressing manner, that it would be more than unkind, it would be rude to refuse. Besides, Mrs George has no children of her own, and she has a comfortable little independence; and if she takes a fancy to Flora, who knows what she may do?"

"Nobody knows, and for that reason it would be wiser to leave Flora in safe possession of the certain advantages which she does already possess."

“ But, my dear James, who ever heard anything like that? How can a fortnight’s visit to Bath have anything to do with her losing any good?”

“ Does she wish herself to go?”

Mrs Lonsdale brightened up considerably; her brother’s parrying her last question, instead of answering it, she looked upon as a very good sign indeed.

“ Wish to go? of course she does; she has never stayed in Bath, and she wishes very much to see what it is like. I think myself Jane *might* have made it out sometimes to have given her a change in that way, and it would have been no expense to her, for she could easily have shared Eleanor’s room; but *some people* are very much for themselves. Well, now she has a chance, and how nicely she can buy her winter bonnet, which she has put off doing all this time, making that old thing do, which I am sure was not fit for her. And the invitation comes just precisely at

the best time, for I know she is not very well pleased with Henry for meaning to go off just now, when he might so well have stayed to eat his New Year's dinner with her. Let her go, and show him that she can enjoy herself as well as he can. She will be back before he is, I dare say. He can't say, I am sure, that she goes away and leaves him. I have no notion of studying men to the degree that some girls do, staying at home moping when they go out, and then living upon their letters, walking about smiling if they get a good one, and creeping up-stairs to cry if it is a bad one."

Mr Bromley could not help smiling at this picture of engaged happiness.

"Come, James, now I think you must be coming round to my opinion."

Perhaps Mr Bromley was, had he not been arrested by those words of earnest, passionate appeal which had come to him from Eleanor's very heart.

Mrs Lonsdale looked straight at him until he answered.

“ Consider, Louisa, humanly speaking, the perfect happiness of Flora’s present lot; everything that can be desired by the romantic or by the reasonable is hers. She is very young and very inexperienced. You do not know Mrs George Lonsdale enough, to be sure that she is a safe guide for your daughter, in a new and trying phase of life. Here she is safe and happy, and the influence of Mordaunt is every day working good both to her mind and to her heart. Undoubtedly the movements of your own child are under your control ; but, considering the circumstances in which she is placed, you must allow me very seriously to advise your not allowing her to go to Bath.”

Mrs Lonsdale, who had begun to hope for a very different opinion, gave a look of disturbed disappointment when he had ended ; and then, after playing a little with the walnut shells upon her plate, a new thought struck her.

"Suppose we refer the matter to Henry himself?"

"You must excuse my again differing with you," replied Mr Bromley, resuming his calm, deliberate manner. "I think you had better decide the point for yourself at once, for you would give Mordaunt an ungracious appearance in Flora's eyes, if you made him the instrument of depriving her of what you say she considers a pleasure."

"But I don't see, I am sure, what right he has to deprive her of a pleasure, when he is going off to enjoy himself."

"Then, if you are not prepared to abide by his decision, why refer the matter to him? It is very possible that he may object to Flora's going to large parties and balls (which, once under Mrs George Lonsdale's care, she could not well avoid) unaccompanied by him, and therefore it would be wise in you, Louisa, to forestal all such feelings on his part, and to prevent such subjects ever being discussed at all,

by asserting your natural authority, and keeping a strict supervision over your daughter's actions, perhaps even stricter than he himself would think necessary, were the power delegated to him. Thus you might prevent quarrels which never should arise, and for which very few reconciliations ever compensate; and thus you would preserve that delicate reverence and tender respect which should be in a man's heart when he meets his bride at the altar, as unsullied and entire as when he first ventured to approach her, and plead for her affection."

Mr Bromley spoke with more feeling than he was in the habit of showing; but for all the effect his words had upon Mrs Lonsdale, he might as well have read to her a few well-rounded sentences from the "Rambler."

"Well, James," she said, affecting an air of indifference, and putting on a smile which was not natural, "really we have been talking very gravely about nothing, have we not?—just

a short visit, which can do neither good nor harm. Mrs George wanted an answer by return of post, and I have kept her letter much too long unanswered. I will go to the drawing-room and just think about it, and write a few lines to-night. She spoke of the long time since she had seen any of her husband's family; and it won't do to be unkind to her, just as she is showing herself so friendly, will it?"

If Mrs Lonsdale had expected an answer to the last half query, she did not get it. Mr Bromley considered that he had delivered his decided opinion as plainly as words could convey it, and it was against his rule to attempt anything like coercion of judgment or interference with the free agency of others. His advice was ready for all who required it, but that once given, he thought that the responsibility then rested with those who received it. When Mrs Lonsdale—having stood up for a little time and waited, under the pretence of

carefully wiping a few particles of salt from her sleeve with her pocket-handkerchief, hoping that he would say something that would better reconcile her to following her own way—had at last departed, he laid the “Edinburgh Review” across his knee for a little while; then, finding thought rather more troublesome than usual, he took up the book, and made himself interested in a brilliant article.

Mrs Lonsdale made her entrance into the drawing-room with a quick movement, which, in a house where the well-hanging and proper oiling of doors was less attended to than at Carstone Rectory, might have made an unpleasant sound; and then she went direct to her writing-case, and at once opened it and began to write, rather proud of having decided for herself, and rather uncomfortable about it too. Her appearance abruptly closed the discussions for the happy future which Henry Mordaunt and Flora had been carrying on with such full, fond confidence by the glowing light of the Christ-

mas fire. He had been talking the most, and she had been listening with a trust the most entire ; everything he suggested was right, every sentiment he uttered was perfect ; she as little questioned what he said as she would have doubted the words of an angel who had stood beside her with folded wings, bearing a message from heaven.

When the world was young, a human pair were thus together, and the spirit of all evil, beholding, envied, and envying, worked their ruin.

Oh, mother, mother ! pause before you help that spirit's work,—before you send out into the world that ductile, yielding child, to go, as Eve went forth, alone !

CHAPTER IX.

“The harmful influence of the place
She went to, fill'd my soul with dread ;
She, mixing with the people there,
Might come back alter'd, having caught
The foolish, fashionable air
Of knowing all, and feeling nought.”

COVENTRY PATMORE.

“MY dear Miss Stuart,” said Mrs George Lonsdale, who had just entered Mrs Grant’s room in very fashionable walking costume, “I am going to depute to you what I am sure will be quite a pleasure—will you go to meet your cousin at the station?—my maid shall attend you. It will be so much more natural

and pleasant for Flora to see you, as I am quite a stranger to her ; and, besides, I must be off to this tiresome diorama, which I dare say is not worth looking at, but Lady Crampton has made up her mind that it is ; really she is a little *exigeante*, but one does n't like to be ill-natured. I shall be back quite in time to receive Flora, but I cannot contrive to go to the station ; and, as I said before, it will be so much more agreeable for her to see you, and have her little private chat on her way here."

" I am sorry that Eleanor cannot go out to-day," said Mrs Grant for her, before she had time to answer. " She was suffering from face-ache this morning, and I would not on any account let her expose herself to those cold draughts at the station."

This reply was given somewhat tartly, and it expressed as plainly as if the words had been added, " You want to make a convenience of Eleanor, and I won't allow it."

" Ah, then," said Mrs Lonsdale, without the

slightest change of manner, "I suppose Jane must go alone—she can easily see to Flora's luggage and put her into a fly," and then, with unaltered good-humour, she expressed her sorrow for Eleanor's face-ache, and recommended an infusion of poppy-heads, explaining with the kindest minuteness how it ought to be used; and then she looked at the window, and then at her watch, by which Mrs Grant, who was not in the best of humours, understood that she had come down to sit with them until Lady Crampton's carriage drove up, in order not to keep her one minute waiting.

"I wonder Lady Crampton does n't keep a companion," observed Mrs Grant, in that sort of dry tone which implies that something uncomplimentary is intended, though it is not clearly expressed.

"A companion!" returned Mrs Lonsdale, "the very thing we were talking about the other evening; how curious that you should sug-

gest it. Lady Crampton very justly observed that what is called a companion would be no companion to her. How detestable, she said, are the attempts to please made by poor creatures who are paid to be agreeable. You cannot depend upon their opinions, which are sure to agree with your own; and you have no pleasure in their praise, which you are always suspecting to be flattery. She added that a companion 'would very soon be the death of her.' Disinterested and independent attentions are all she cares for."

"Poor thing," was the short response of Mrs Grant.

"I hear that this diorama is really very good," remarked Eleanor, anxious to change the subject. "Some who know Germany very well say that the scenes are very truthfully drawn."

"Yes, I believe they are. You shall go with me some day to see it, my dear; mind we do n't forget it."

Mrs Grant resettled herself in her chair, and did not look at all more amiable than before.

“Thank you,” said Eleanor, politely. “I dare say Flora will enjoy it; most sights are new to her.”

“Are they? That is very nice, for it is so difficult to amuse people who have seen everything and know everything. Will you drink tea with me this evening, Miss Stuart, to have a nice, quiet talk with your cousin? I expect nobody, for I thought she would be tired, and a tired face never shows to advantage. Come up as early as you can, and we shall be so snug and comfortable; our only interruption will be the milliner, who is to come to fit on the body of a dress for Flora, for the skirt is already made. You see I know how to manage; and her mamma quite agreed with me that a girl’s first appearance should be in a perfectly new dress. There is more in fashion than some people are willing to believe. Nowhere in Bath do people dress so well as at Mrs Bolder’s.”

"Then," said Mrs Grant, "they must make their hostess feel a little uncomfortable, for I never saw a stranger figure than she makes of herself in the street."

"Why, to be sure, she *is* a little eccentric, but then you see, my dear Mrs Grant, she is Mrs Bolder."

"I shall be very happy to come to you this evening," said Eleanor, feeling that in her aunt's present humour they were again on dangerous ground.

"There's a good girl, and you can help in our consultation about the trimmings. I think I can pretty well guess what will suit Flora, though I have not seen her for such an age. I think she must be dressed in an animated, tasteful way, and have all sorts of little *prettinesses* about her, something like those charming little figures in Sèvres china. She must have a wee, wee tablet to put down her engagements, with a fascinating chain to it, and a coquettish little fan, surrounded by the most

playful-looking feathers, and dew-drops must glisten very much on the flowers in her hair. Oh, I understand these things a *little*, I assure you ; at least my friends say I do."

"Now I should say," observed Mrs Grant, "that a girl who is engaged to a clergyman had better keep quiet, and have nothing to do with dancing tablets and coquetting fans."

Mrs George Lonsdale laughed gently, a little superior laugh, and then she wished them good morning, for the portly form of Lady Crampton's coachman, seated on his box, had glided past the window like a figure in a magic lantern.

"That woman is growing *insufferable*," exclaimed Mrs Grant, when the door had closed behind her. "When she thinks she is making such a fine impression upon us, how *little* she shows herself about her Lady Cramptons and her Mrs Bolders. Selfish thing, to go off to the diorama, and want you to go down waiting about at that cold station for *her* visitor ; and

I dare say you would have gone if I had not spoken in time."

Eleanor felt that she would have gone, that she would have liked to have done so, in order to be friendly and affectionate to Flora from the very first, so that, if her influence were required, it might be used with the greater power ; nothing gives so much power as love ; nothing makes influence so effectual as the trust of another in our affection. Eleanor was feeling this now very deeply, and in her awakened anxiety for Flora, she remembered with sadness the little real confidence that had ever existed between them. She did not tell herself now, as she might have done before, that they were so different, that their natures were so uncongenial, that sympathy was impossible. No, a change, powerful and radical, but silent and unseen, was taking place within her, and she remembered now, with that humility which approaches to the gentle spirit of the child, the time when she, being strong,

had despised rather than borne the infirmities of the weak ; her own weak hour had taught her this, a time when perchance we learn more than in the most glorious flights of our happy, exulting intellect.

After working and thinking for a little time, Eleanor took up a book which she had commenced, as a sort of ballast to keep the mind steady amidst the gossip which was almost sure to be met with in the course of every afternoon. She had just become interested in it when Mrs Grant put her spectacles upon the table, folded her hands, and looked up with the air of a person suddenly primed for conversation.

“ She might just as well have asked you to go with her to Mrs Bolder’s.”

“ But I do n’t at all care about going.”

“ But you ought to care, Eleanor ; what is come over you that you do n’t care ? Why should you shut yourself up more than other girls ? ”

Then poor Mrs Grant’s conscience smote

her for having said "what is come over you?" and, just because she was sorry, she looked still more cross.

"I shall enjoy society when it comes in my way," returned Eleanor, cheerfully, "but I am quite of your opinion—I never court it; enjoyment is not worth the sacrifice of the smallest portion of self-respect."

"Of course it is not," said Mrs Grant, relieved by her cheerfulness; "but I can't see why this precious Mrs George Lonsdale can't take you out as well as Flora. I am sure better judges than she is have said that you are an ornament to society."

Eleanor closed her book in astonishment; there are some people who so rarely express their opinions, that, when they do produce a compliment, it takes us altogether by surprise.

"Thank you," she said, smiling very brightly, "you have given me a hundred times more pleasure than if I had had an invitation to the party."

Mrs Grant began to smile too, in spite of herself, but only for a little time, and then the tears came into her eyes. Eleanor drew close to her, and lovingly laid her soft hand upon her arm.

"I can't help it, my dear, I can't help it; I am very poorly and nervous to-day, and when people are spiteful it always makes me low."

Eleanor felt that this was all from thought and care for her, the unselfish jealousy of kind love she called it to herself; and a well-spring of still deeper affection rose up in her heart, and she knew how very precious to her was this aunt who in her time of depression had sometimes seemed so peevish and so trying. She must exert herself to give her pride and pleasure, and she would. She did not contradict her assertion, for though she thought "spiteful" certainly too strong a word, she felt that Mrs Lonsdale was constantly passing by opportunities of being kind to her in her peculiar position, and she sympathised in her aunt's irritation at her repeated

and uncalled-for professions. She did not care for company now as she had done ; and it pained her to know that it was so ; still that made no difference as to the behaviour of others. Some little time was given to soothing Mrs Grant's depressed mood, and none knew better than Eleanor, when she chose (and lately she had determined that she always would choose), how to apply the proper words at the proper time to those disturbed in any way, either from great causes or from minor sources of irritation ; her great intuitive tact should now be a talent ever ready to be used for the happiness of others.

“ And now,” said Eleanor, when Mrs Grant, having completely recovered herself, had put on her spectacles, and taken up her knitting,—
“ now let us have quite a candid talk about Mrs George Lonsdale.”

“ Perhaps she is not worth the trouble,” returned Mrs Grant, with a little toss of her head, and a tight pull at her cotton.

“ I fancy she is,” answered Eleanor, smiling.

“ I want you quite to understand what I feel about her, that you should never fancy I am vexed or disappointed when I am not.”

“ Well ? ”

“ Well then, to begin, I like her quite as little as you do—I am afraid even less ; but I intend to be more charitable in that way, because, as I know all her foibles, I ought to be able to put up with them.”

“ Rather odd reasoning.”

“ Yes, I dare say it is ; I mean, that when you know people just as they are, they cannot disappoint, and therefore they ought not to disturb you. Shall I go on, and say just what I think ? ”

“ Yes, child, do.”

“ Then, I think Mrs George Lonsdale to be a thoroughly worldly woman, worldly in principle and in action. She is very clever in her particular line and very successful, for you see in the short time she has been here, in the way of society she has left behind her people

of much better fortune and real standing than herself; but I would not descend to one of the pitiful means and little manœuvres which she has used to attain this object to put a crown-imperial upon my head. We do not suit each other—she knows it quite as well as I do. I could not be her companion without doing as she does, or at least admiring what she does. She considers herself worthy of envy, and certainly she is envied by a great many, because she is the chief friend of Lady Crampton, and because she has the *entrée* at Mrs Bolder's: but I feel with you, I would be no one's friend who is to be won by flattery, and I will enter no assembly where my first appearance must be on sufferance merely."

"How much more pride are you going to bring out?"

"No more; only I say all this that you may quite understand how impossible it is for Mrs George Lonsdale and myself to be really friends, and that you may never again be so kind as to

be vexed for me, when you think that she neglects me, or leaves me out in any of her arrangements. You know that there will be a great deal going on in the fortnight that Flora is here, and so you must promise me never to fancy in all that time that I am dull or annoyed about anything."

"Well, well, have it your own way; only I should have thought that, whether you agreed or not in some things, she would have been proud to have taken you about with her."

"You may hold to that opinion as much as you like," said Eleanor, laughing; "I shall not dispute it. And now let us dismiss Mrs George Lonsdale in a sort of charitable way, intending to treat her kindly and to expect nothing from her; shall I read to you? I have a book which I think you will like, the *Memoirs* of Sydney Smith. I find it exceedingly interesting. Would you like to hear a little of it?"

"Yes."

And Eleanor did read a little, and a very

little it was, for before she had gone through half a page, ret a tet, tet, tet, tet sounded vigorously, and Miss Curryer appeared, overwhelming them with apologies for not having called before.

It is to be feared that Eleanor was thinking all the while that the apologies might have been better employed in excusing her coming so soon ; but still she received her better than usual, though the improving spirit had yet some struggles to make before it could take Miss Curryer within its pale. Other knocks succeeded, and the room was not cleared until tea time. When she had made the tea, Eleanor went to the window, and sat looking out upon the dark street, so gloomy in the evening fog, with the lamps shedding an indistinct and sickly light. Now and then, but not continuously, came the sound of carriage wheels passing on and becoming fainter in the distance. Where was the fly bearing the happy Flora ? why had she not remained at Carstone ?

ah, why did she come here? why, for her own sake? and, added Eleanor's heart, as with a low faint murmur, "why for mine?"

"There, her mighty politeness has happened to have brought her home in time," exclaimed Mrs Grant, as Lady Crampton's carriage stopped at the door. "I am so sick of the sight of that livery, that I don't know what to do when I see it. I wish Mrs George would flatter herself into the good graces of some family with any other facings than blue."

Scarcely had the carriage driven off, when a fly came rumbling along the street and stopped. It was what Eleanor was looking for, but when it came, she retreated from the window, and sat down, and began to pour out the tea.

The bustle of an arrival took place in the passage, and then steps passed their door and went up-stairs.

What a relief that Flora had not come in at once to see them!

* * * * *

"Do n't you think it must be time for you to go up-stairs?" said Mrs Grant, who had been supposed by Eleanor to be asleep. "I have just heard the tea-tray carried up."

"Yes : I will go," answered Eleanor, looking up from her silent gazing into the fire. "I shall be down early, I dare say before you go to bed, and Mary will bring you a nice little supper, that you must promise to like."

"Ah ! I shall not be able to eat one mouthful, I am sure, to-night," said Mrs Grant, with a hopeless sigh, as if she had been asked to do something very hard and difficult.

Eleanor leaned over the back of her chair and kissed her, for at that moment her spirit seemed to cling to one who loved her ; and then she left the room. She went up-stairs and stood for a moment on the landing, which was brightly illuminated by a gas-lamp ; the cost of its lighting had caused a battle sore and long between Mrs George Lonsdale and Mrs Manners, which had ended in the dis-

comfiture of the latter, who had felt herself both aggrieved and disgusted by the extent of scientific information displayed by her acute lodger. Eleanor wondered why she thought of this now, and then, as an excuse for further hesitation, she fixed her eyes on a figure of Silence in one corner, with his finger (vain admonition!) perpetually upon his lips. After a pause unusual to her, she tapped at the drawing-room door and entered.

"My dear Eleanor, how very, very glad I am to see you!" exclaimed Flora, rushing up to her and kissing her affectionately—but with a little trepidation in her manner, as if the meeting had made her feel nervous. Eleanor's greeting was kind and cordial, and if from any inward cause Flora had felt ill at ease, that cause appeared removed when they were seated side by side at the tea table.

With more than usual graciousness, and with the sweetest smiles, Mrs George Lonsdale dispensed the tea, and recommended the Sally

Lunn. So Eleanor gathered from her manner that her first sight of her niece had proved entirely satisfactory.

There was some change in Flora already. She appeared more womanly, and there was a little conscious air about her, as if she always carried with her a gratifying sense of the dignity of her position: she, the chosen of Henry Mordaunt—the affianced wife of that acme of all human perfection. In appearance Eleanor did not think her improved, perhaps because she had not had time to attend to those little adornments which so embellished her style of beauty, and perhaps, more likely, because she had formed of her—the successful rival—an ideal too bright and lovely for reality.

“After all my forebodings,” she thought, “Flora’s fortnight in Bath may pass away in a very uneventful and harmless manner, and my fears may have had their source merely in my own nervous imagination;” and when that thought had passed through her mind, she

tried to make inquiries for all at Carstone. When she was considering—the worst thing she could have done—how to begin, Flora observed,—

“I never saw a real Sally Lunn before; how nice it is!”

The observation was responded to by Mrs Lonsdale, who made it lead to snug parties and large parties, and concerts and balls, with a rapidity that precluded any other subject, and Eleanor, though she felt that she had been cowardly, was relieved.

“If you please, ma’am,” said the maid, entering the room daintily, in her French cap and cherry-coloured ribbons, “a box from Germaine’s,” and she placed it on a side-table.

Mrs Lonsdale nodded and smiled at Flora, as if to express that the delightful interest of that box belonged to her. “No more tea, Miss Stuart? Then we will at once look at the flowers, and see which will suit Flora the best.”

“Oh, *might* I have a candle first to fetch my

writing case?" exclaimed Flora, giving a hurried glance at a pretty tiny watch, which Eleanor had never seen before, and therefore she knew that it must be the gift of Henry Mordaunt. "You said a letter must be in the post before ten, and Henry would be so unhappy and so *angry* if he did not get one to-morrow morning, to tell him that I arrived safe."

A slight frown—a very, *very* slight frown—was just visible between Mrs George Lonsdale's well-curved eye-brows, and then, with the greatest politeness, she opened the door, and brought from the slab one of her brightly-polished chamber-candlesticks (never sent down for Mary to clean), and presented it to her guest.

"Oh, thank you," said Flora, and she left the room rather more quickly than politeness might have allowed. She was one of those who find one idea at a time sufficient to engross the attention.

"A *wee* bit of polishing will make her perfect," observed Mrs Lonsdale, when she had dis-

appeared. "It is a pity that she has engaged herself so young, but that can't be helped now. We must make the best of it. Open the box, do, my dear, if you please, and let us judge for her, if she is too much wrapped up in this lover of hers to judge for herself." Eleanor took off the cover of the box, and turned over the elegant wreaths abstractedly.

"That will be the one. Yes, I think that will be the one," exclaimed Mrs George, looking admiringly at a delicate white wreath, glistening brightly with its artificial dew.

"Yes, this is lovely," returned Eleanor; "but blue is the colour that really suits Flora the best."

"Well, she shall have a blue wreath next time, but I think she had better have white for to-morrow. A girl should not look her best at first. She should rise like the sun. There—how poetical Mr Dillon would call me for that idea. My dear, you *must* know him. You would be mutually charmed. I wonder what

he will think of Flora? I know she will *take*. I don't think any of the girls here will stand a comparison with her. Miss Tryon Jones is the most formidable, because she saves her partners the trouble of talking, and the men here are so insufferably lazy. As for Miss Cathcart, she really is getting *passée*, and the Miss Furnivalls are bad dressers. I think—I *rather* think—I shall make some of the people look about them to-morrow night."

"She did not care to look at the flowers, she only thought of writing to Henry Mordaunt. She must be safe through all this," was the inward reflection of Eleanor.

"You must choose elegant drooping white feathers for your next party," said Mrs George, supposing that her silence proceeded from envy at Flora's anticipated triumphs, and that a word or two about herself would cheer her a little.

"I have some very handsome feathers, a

present from my uncle," returned Eleanor, calmly, "they are my favourite head-dress."

"How curious! we always agree in matters of taste, do n't we? Wherever is this girl? Why, the boy from Germaine's will be back again in half an hour, and it was only as a very great favour that I got such an assortment left so long."

At this moment Flora entered with her writing-case.

"Come, my dear, before you begin writing you really must select your flowers, for I expect the boy to fetch them every minute."

Flora set down her case, glanced uneasily at the time-piece, and then went to the open box. When once there, her admiration of its contents quite satisfied Mrs George, and she found it so difficult to choose, that only the actual arrival of the important boy decided her wavering fancy in favour of the white wreath first fixed upon by her hostess.

"Do not hurry yourself, my dear," said

Mrs George, when this weighty matter had been settled, "you have a full half hour for writing, and you only just want to say that you are here."

Full five minutes were spent in mending her pen, and then Flora commenced; how fast she wrote, and how often she looked up at the time, as if grudging every minute that flew so swiftly by. She who used to be so meagre and unsatisfactory a writer now appeared to have only too much to say.

CHAPTER X.

“O let thy soul
Remember what the will of Heaven ordains
Is ever good for all, and if for all,
Then good for thee.”—AKENSIDE.

“AND this is life, or rather a dying while one seems to live. Here am I cut off from the great purposes of my being just when they promised fulfilment.”

“All is for the best,” replied a deep, low voice, with touching earnestness.

“*All is for the best!*” echoed the first speaker with a mocking querulousness. “Have you nothing fresher to observe than that? why,

that is sugared over and served up in whimpering children's first story books, and croaked out by old, ignorant village dames when they have no better comfort ready for their cronies in distress."

"That which is both the lesson of childhood, and the staff of simple, faithful age, must be a sublime truth, bringing strength to those who receive it."

"Ay, ay, Allan, it is easy enough to preach to others. What did *you* say, when, instead of misfortune, fortune came upon you, beyond all you could have hoped or dreamed? Did you then lift up your head and say 'All is for the best?'"

A spasm, as of bodily pain passed over the young man's face.

"When Job was crushed by many sorrows, he opened his mouth and cursed his day; when you were overpowered by many blessings, what did you do?"

"I deeply sinned."

These words were the language of the very soul. No one upon whose ears they fell could doubt it. All bitterness and invective ceased, and a silence followed, which to each it seemed impossible to break.

* * * * *

Who can tell how deeply into some spirits will sink the sense of error ; and how then, taking root downward, it will upward bear all good and noble fruit ?

Allan Mountjoy sat quite still, with his arms folded for a long time, until gradually a change came over him, which appeared to soften not only each line of his face, but every muscle of the motionless figure. At length an expression was in his eye, tender as that of a loving woman, as his gaze was raised from the ground and turned upon his companion.

His companion was an old man, a *very* old man he looked in his present mood of despair ; his form was tall, gaunt, and spare, and his long back was quite curved from

habitual stooping; his right hand hung helplessly over one arm of his easy chair, and the other was clutching at his guard with a fidgety, tremulous movement. In his heart was the smothered pain which comes to those who are both testy and generous, when they have given words sharper than the two-edged sword.

"My father," said Allan, gently, "you must be weary of this one spot. It is milder to-day, and if you like to go out it will do you good. May I get you a chair?"

The old man groaned; he was that most pitiable being—a paralytic, smitten down but not resigned.

"May I go?" and the voice was as soft and the glance as wistful as those of a mother studying the wishes of her sick child.

"Allan, what does me good in one way harms me in another. You are right, I am weary—weary of all things; but if I go out, the east wind, the cruel wind, that now is always sending about its blighting breath, will

hurt my eyes ; my poor eyes, my precious eyes, and I want more than anything else to get them cured, that I may go on with my work. And now time is passing, passing on, always passing ; and my work, my great work, the work of my life, is standing still."

"I have asked every question I could think of about you, and Dr Barton is quite sure that what improves your general health will do good to your eyes ; and on mild days he says it is much better for you to go out."

"Then let me go."

Allan Mountjoy immediately left the room, and in an incredibly short time returned with a chair ; his movements were all rapid, when he had not weighing upon him the chain of a position to which he was unaccustomed. With one hand placed upon the chair in which sat the melancholy invalid, he went on where the man went, without giving any orders as to their route ; and they were soon in the Victoria Park, a place to which Bath chairmen seem

naturally to go to if they have no directions to the contrary. The wintry sun was shining cheerfully, and making all things look brighter than those who on that day confined themselves to the streets could have imagined possible. A fair show of private carriages appeared, and now and then a hired fly bearing along some invalid, who had come out to inhale a precious hour of fresh air,—a few horsemen, and many pedestrians.

Allan did not ask his companion how he felt, as he knew that to be a question to which he had a particular objection ; but occasionally, when they reached the higher ground, he would look at him, and perceive with pleasure that he was placid and comfortable.

“ Who was that bowing so to you ? ” asked the old man, looking up from under his shade.

“ To me ! ” returned Allan, “ I saw no one.”

“ Then my eyes, after all, are better than yours. There was somebody bowing, an old lady from a carriage window, bowing, as if she

would bow her head off, and all the feathers and flowers bowing too; and then two other ladies jumped up as if they had been electrified, and looked very hard at you. Ah, ah! you are somebody now, I perceive; you must have seen them, the carriage passed so close to us."

Allan felt greatly disconcerted,—a lady had bowed to him in a public place, and he had not returned her salute. An awkward occurrence for any man, but to him it appeared, at the moment, a misdemeanour of the most lamentable kind. Where had his thoughts been? Buried in the past, soaring on to the future, in the land of the ideal, moving over the troubled waters of a spirit in great commotion with itself, dwelling on the heavy duties and the grave responsibilities of its new life; to all of these things they had been in turn devoted, but to the call of the passing moment they had been wanting. Alas! poor Allan Mountjoy, so conscious of your many social

deficiencies and shortcomings, what a *contre-temps* this was for you.

“Never mind,” said the old man, sarcastically, “you can afford now to be absent, or forgetful, or even rude, if so it pleases you.”

“No,” thought Allan, “I, of all men, cannot afford it.”

And so he walked on abstractedly, and deep in thought, until he became quite ashamed of the serious form which such a trifling incident was assuming. A trifle is however often the key which unlocks some repository of unpleasant things.

A small hand was frankly held out to Allan Mountjoy, and a sweet smile from behind a thick veil pierced at once through the clouds of his moody humour.

“How are you? So you are now in Bath; I was so sorry that I was not at home to see you when you called.”

“You cannot think how disappointed I was not to find you,” and Allan’s face was radiant

with pleasure, and his manner, worked upon by the genuine feelings of his heart, for that moment at least was faultless.

"Your friend, I suppose, is with you," said Eleanor Stuart, glancing at the chair, to which Allan's hand had returned, as if it were a thing to be watched over and sacredly guarded.

"Yes: let me tell him who you are, let the two good angels of my life be known to each other. Herr Schlegel, this is Eleanor Stuart, —Miss Stuart, this is the being heaven sent to me, as you were."

"This is no ordinary introduction," said Eleanor, bending gracefully forward, and offering her hand; "I trust, indeed, that I shall have the privilege of knowing you better."

Herr Schlegel fidgeted about in his chair, and then took her hand, and, as he did so, the outward appearance of Allan's second angel did not strike her as very prepossessing; a sort of crabbed veil covered a countenance deeply furrowed by time and thought. He had

a sarcastic mouth, and the eyes were shrouded by a green shade, from underneath which he was giving a sharp upward glance at her.

"I have not been long enough in Bath to have mastered its fine speeches, young lady. I hope you are well."

Allan looked much distressed, and glanced at Eleanor to mark the effect of this chilling reply.

"A face might as well be under a mask as under such a veil as that," he thought, disappointed at not being able to discover that she was not offended.

Eleanor did not say anything more to Herr Schlegel, but retreated a little, so as to be by the side of Allan.

"He is not at all well to-day," said Allan, apologetically.

"I am very sorry to hear it."

"If you knew him, I am sure you would like him."

"I have not the least doubt of it."

"How good you are!"

"You must not say that again," said Eleanor, in a rather sorrowful tone.

"I will not then, I will only think it."

"I must join my aunt now, or her chair will be beyond my powers of overtaking; sometime you must tell me all about Herr Schlegel."

"I will go on, and stop the man." And Allan was off in a moment, and soon the chair was returning to meet her, and he beside it, listening attentively to Mrs Grant, who was talking and smiling most courteously, to remove the impression of that unlucky call. Soon Allan was again by Eleanor's side, and they were following the two chairs in their progress round the park.

"You are interested in Herr Schlegel," said Allan.

"I am: the little you have told me has made me wish to hear more."

"As you gave my boyhood hope, so he saved my youth from despair."

"I rejoice that you met with such a friend."

"Thank you for still caring for a fate in which you once took such noble interest."

"But we were speaking of Herr Schlegel. How greatly you must delight in now being able to be to him the solace that once he was to you."

"Alas! I can do little for him; his great grief I cannot reach."

"What is that great grief, in which love, and honour, and sympathy can do nothing?"

"You imply that much could be done. I dare say you are right. His grief is, that having spent so many years in collecting materials for a great work, he is now paralysed and forced to be inactive; his head is confused, his right hand is powerless, and his sight is dim, and he is warned that if he tries it now it will be lost to him for ever."

"Poor man, poor man," said Eleanor, deeply touched, "he is indeed to be pitied, few can understand how much."

"I knew you would feel for him. It makes

me very sad to see a mind like his restless as a caged lion, knowing his strength, but unable to exert it."

"There will be a time when all that now seems dark will be as clear as light," said Eleanor, in a tone scarcely above a whisper, and too sorrowful it sounded for mere sympathy.

"Raise your veil," said Allan, suddenly, "I cannot see the face that I knew of old."

Without a comment, Eleanor complied with this strange request.

What could the most discerning have read in a countenance pale and delicate, and an eye soft, kind, and tranquil? A cloud came to Sir Allan's brow, and he fell into one of those dark, moody humours which used at times to visit that rough, untutored lad, Allan Mountjoy of the olden time.

* * * * *

"How strange, my dear," remarked Mrs Grant. "He is gone off, and he did not say good-bye, or even take off his hat to me."

CHAPTER XI.

“ We know how soon a Lady’s ear
Will list the honey’d sound to hear:
At the same time, I ’m free to say
I think the men as vain as they.”

DOCTOR SYNTAX.

“ AH, what is that—something new ? ” said the Hon. Frederick Dillon to a friend who was standing with him at the entrance to Mrs Bolder’s rooms.

“ New—where ? ” returned the friend, casting his eyes all round him. “ I see nothing new ; everything here is as old as Mrs Bolder herself, and her everlasting crimson velvet.”

“ What a dull fellow you are, Tuson ; some-

thing new and human I mean. Do n't you see that girl in white, sitting on the sofa by the side of that guileless being Mrs Lonsdale ? ”

“ I hate that Mrs Lonsdale.”

“ But I do n't want your opinion of her ; what do you think of her companion ? ”

“ Nay, Dillon, what do *you* think of her ? that is the most important question. What does the Queen-maker say—is she to be a *belle*, or a cipher ? ”

“ You really do me too much honour. Adieu for the present. I am going across the room to get Miss Tryon Jones to talk for both of us, while I take a closer survey.”

“ Well, give me the benefit of your valuable opinion when it is formed. Look, there is Lepel close to her, with his quiver full of flatteries, dying to be introduced, and trying to look as if he did n't care about it,—and there is Mrs Lonsdale dying to introduce him, and waiting for the most dignified opportunity. The very fact of her being with such a woman

is enough for me,—I should never care to know her.”

“ Illiberal and uncharitable being ! I judge individually, and not circumstantially,” and Mr Dillon glided off, enjoying a little the consciousness that his judgment was of far greater value to the world of Bath than that of his friend Tuson.

“ I thought Mrs Bolder would have better rooms than these,” said Flora to Mrs Lonsdale, trying, by the sound of her own voice, to shake off a tremulous feeling of alarm, which she thought little suited to the dignity of the *fiancée* of the perfect Henry Mordaunt, and yet it would embarrass her. She was very new to society.

“ Hush, hush, my dear, we will talk of that when we get home. When you are out, observe everything and say nothing.”

Mr Lepel brought himself a little nearer.

“ One of the best dancers in Bath,” whispered Mrs Lonsdale, smiling sweetly on

her *protégée* to remove the impression of her late rebuke.

“ That is of no consequence to me. I am engaged to a clergyman, and of course I shall not dance,” thought Flora, but she was afraid to say so; over her impressionable nature Mrs George had already acquired power. Mr Lepel, a young man with very fair hair, and a delicate complexion, like a girl’s, now came close to them.

“ How are you ? ” said Mrs George, with a familiar little nod and a gracious smile.

Mr Lepel shook hands with her with the greatest appearance of friendliness, looking all the while at Flora.

“ Why, I thought you were in Cheltenham ? ”

“ So I was. I returned to Bath this morning, as I found Cheltenham rather slow; very few worth speaking to; positively nobody worth looking at,” and again he glanced at Flora; “ after all, there is nothing like Bath.”

"I am glad you are honest enough to say so."

Mr Lepel bowed, and as he rarely deserved a compliment upon his honesty of tongue, perhaps he had reason to appear grateful.

"You are going to the Monday ball of course?"

"Why, I have a young friend here who tells me that she does not care for dancing, and what," she added, all beaming with smiles, "should an old woman like me do at a ball without her?"

"I never heard, pardon me, two such preposterous things in my life, as that one lady calculated to be an ornament to any ball-room should dislike dancing, and that another should insult one's very eye-sight by calling herself old."

"Mr Lepel, you shocking creature! how dare you compliment a lady when you do not even know her? my dear, I must give you an opportunity of scolding this presuming man, —Mr Lepel, my niece, Miss Flora Lonsdale."

“From what I read in that countenance I have no fear of severity,” said Mr Lepel, with an admiring bow.

Flora blushed and smiled, and looked exceedingly pretty, and not in the least offended.

“And is it true, may I venture to ask, that you do not like dancing? Probably you have been bored with too much.”

“No, I have not; I never was at a public ball in my life.”

“Accounted for,” exclaimed Mr Lepel, emphatically. “Once shining in your proper sphere, all will be different. What does the diamond in the mine know of the value that will be set upon it by crowned heads?”

This speech appeared so sublime, that poor Flora did not know what to say, so she looked rather foolish and played with her bouquet. She did not know that one of the experienced eyes of Mr Dillon was watching her, while the other was devoted to Miss Tryon Jones.

“What do you think of the new appearance,

Miss Jones—I mean the girl Mrs George Lonsdale has in tow ? ”

“ A pretty sort of a question, Mr Dillon, as if I were in the least likely to give you my opinion first, or indeed at all. What woman ever said what she really meant about another, I should like to know ? Now, what do you think of her ? ”

“ Really I am treated too badly to-night. My questions are retorted upon me, not answered.”

“ To be sure they are. If I were to say I think Miss Lonsdale lovely, you would shrug your shoulders, and begin picking her to pieces ; and if I were to say that I see nothing in her, you would shrug your shoulders still, only more slightly and with a very different meaning, not quite complimentary to me. No, no—when I first entered society, which was not yesterday, I said what I thought quite frankly, and you can't think what a character I got for spitefulness and envy, and

everything that was bad. I know better now. So you just tell me, when I see you next, what the public opinion, first set on foot by yourself, is of Miss Lonsdale, and I will repeat it faithfully to every partner, and at every morning call."

Mr Dillon smiled. When he did so he was handsome.

"Look!" she continued, as he did not speak, "there is Mr Lepel breathing his soft nothings into her ear, and Sir Hugh Barton is walking up, looking like a man who intends to be introduced. You will soon follow, and then the triumvirate will be at her feet."

"The triumvirate?"

"Yes, to be sure; don't you know that you and Mr Lepel and Sir Hugh Barton are the triumvirate who elect a *belle* as regularly as the town council elect a mayor? One patronises, the second flatters, and the third goes about praising incessantly, till gentlemen make them-

selves of your opinion, for fear of not being fashionable, and ladies, poor things, pretend to be, to escape being thought jealous."

Mr Dillon smiled again, and looked across at the group fast collecting round Mrs Lonsdale and her fair young charge.

"Miss Jones, I know you are fond of elegant similes."

Miss Tryon Jones was all attention.

"Does not Mrs Lonsdale remind you of the boys who go about London in the fly season, with that odd-looking glutinous substance attached to a paper round their hats, and crying 'Catch 'em alive, catch 'em *alive* !' "

Miss Jones laughed rather more heartily than Chesterfield would have approved.

"Mr Dillon, you are delicious ; you always happen to say something that takes away from the tameness of a party like this."

Mr Dillon was gratified because he felt sure that Miss Jones meant what she said, and she rose a little higher in his estimation

than she stood before. With a smiling farewell he moved away, and went direct to Mrs Lonsdale's sofa, with an action calm and confident, like that of a queen on a chess board, in the hands of a polite and skilful player. His presence was immediately felt by the minor pieces, and a free passage was given him to receive Mrs Lonsdale's welcome, offered with more *empressement* than might have been expected from a lady of so much worldly tact. After exchanging a few words with him, she very soon made an opportunity of introducing him to Flora. Mr Lepel drew back, and Sir Hugh transferred his conversation from Flora to her *chaperon*. Mr Dillon, thus master of the field, merely stood in a negligent, elegant attitude, by Flora's side.

"Are you going to the ball on Monday?" asked Flora, finding that he did not take the initiative.

"I must."

"You must ; why must you?"

"In courtesy I must, because I am on the committee."

"*Are* you?" and Flora began to look upon him as a very superior being. "No wonder," thought she, "that he will not take the trouble to talk much."

"You will be there of course?"

"I do n't know."

Mr Dillon let that reply pass without making it, as Mr Lepel would have done, an opening for persuasion and flattery. Flora was piqued by the contrast.

"I must make more impression upon him than this," she thought, "or how disappointed my aunt will be," and she remembered the hasty whisper in which that experienced guide had told her, as he was approaching, that he was more worth pleasing than any man in the room. Ah, Flora, you have succeeded in pleasing *one*; and two hours ago you thought that was enough for the happiness of any woman's life!

“That lady, with the wreath of ivy, with whom Mr Dillon stayed so long, looked very gay and amusing,” thought Flora, “so that must be the style to take with him.” So she smiled brightly, and became animated, and would have given anything for one of those brilliant flashes which would emanate from Eleanor in her gayer moods and light up all around her. Eleanor indeed!—no, she could envy her no longer now; she should never feel, again as she had at that party at Cranberry Hall, for Eleanor had failed to win that precious prize which had come to her; still it was very awkward to feel as she did just then. Oh for something sparkling to say to Mr Dillon.

“*O quanta species inquit, cerebrū non habet,*” said Mr Dillon to himself.

“Why does he not entertain her, the supercilious creature?” thought Mrs Lonsdale, “she makes the prettiest listener I ever saw. Mr Dillon,” and she leant towards him in her most fascinating way, “I have been tell-

ing my little novice here, that no one can describe people half so well as you can, and she wants to know all about everybody."

"Consider me in a witness-box, Miss Lonsdale, awaiting your questions."

Poor Flora! she felt herself compelled to appropriate a curiosity which she certainly had never expressed.

She looked round the room in search of something to say.

"Who is that funny little old woman, so oddly dressed, who scarcely speaks to anybody?"

"Mrs Bolder."

Flora became extremely embarrassed, and could say no more. Not to know her own hostess! how stupid he must think her; how silly she had been to pay so little attention to what was passing on her nervous entrance into the room when Mrs Lonsdale had introduced her to two or three ladies, whom she had seen through a sort of mist.

Mr Dillon, being at heart a good-natured man, came to the rescue.

“ I am not the least surprised at a stranger taking our revered hostess for anything but herself. You must know, Miss Lonsdale, that she is quite an original, and will not move in the same fixed orbit as commonplace everyday hostesses. She is often not forthcoming when her guests arrive, and it is to be presumed that she thinks taking leave a bore, for when you are seeking her to offer your parting homage she may have disappeared.”

“ What a strange person,” said the reassured Flora.

“ These are not her only peculiarities,—when she has once invited her guests, she takes no further interest in them ; her notions of our English birthright of liberty are so strict, that without the slightest interference she leaves us to amuse ourselves in our own way.”

“ I was told her parties were so nice.”

"So they are; what can be better than this? no poor, lazy being requested to find a partner; no alarmed young lady obliged to sing or play by moral coercion; everybody allowed to do nothing without being bored."

Flora remained prettily attentive, but not responsive; something new this for Mr Dillon to be obliged to find the conversation; he rather liked it; his fair friends were generally too eager to entertain him.

"Surely your curiosity is not already satisfied?"

"Who then," asked Flora, "is that lady with the wreath of ivy?"

"That is Miss Tryon Jones."

"Oh, the lady who talks so much."

"Is that a rare female characteristic?"

Flora smiled very prettily.

"And who are those two ladies who look like sisters, and who are so oddly dressed?"

"Those are the Misses Furnivall. *Belles* I assure you they are, or they might be. A

naughty friend of mine says he looks anxiously every day in the *Times*, hoping to see a death in the family."

"A death! what for?"

"Why then they must go into mourning, and in spite of themselves they would dress in better taste."

Flora gave a pleasant little laugh, and looked a great deal of admiration of Mr Dillon, and appreciation of his wit.

"There is more in her than I fancied," thought he.

"What a strange, rough-looking young man that is, who spoke a few words to Lady Crampton just now,—there, that one I mean whose hair wants cutting; do you know who he is?"

"Certainly, that is His Majesty Attila, King of the Huns."

Flora felt it her duty to appear very much amused; though she was sorely at a loss to think what he could possibly mean.

"Hush, no more," continued her informant,
"His Majesty is now within hearing."

"Now I have seen all the girls I have heard about but Miss Cathcart, where is she?"

"Not far off," he answered, lowering his voice very much. "There she is to your left, the one with the white feathers in her hair."

"Oh, but you do n't call her a beauty?"

"I call her nothing. You asked for her, and there she is."

"I call her nothing, too (Mr Dillon smiled). That is the girl, then, who is always at parties, and has been out so many seasons and is not married yet." (Mr Dillon slightly elevated his finely-arched brows.)

"Poor young lady!"

This ejaculation burst involuntarily from Attila, King of the Huns, and who was indeed within hearing.

His tone of serious compassion was ludicrously misunderstood by Flora and Mr Lepel,

the young man whom Mr Dillon had called, who was still hovering near her. They both began to laugh with much amusement. In great confusion Attila retreated, stepping backwards, until he found a sort of refuge in the shadow of a window curtain; he was close to Miss Cathcart, so much so that one foot rested on her fragile flounce. Just then a general movement was made, and a portly, dignified-looking gentleman came and offered his arm to Miss Cathcart. She rose quickly, and the detained flounce was nearly severed from her dress, and hopelessly torn. In total discomfiture the unhappy Attila tried to frame some apology, but could not succeed in bringing out a word.

"It was my fault and the fashion's. I moved too suddenly, pray do not distress yourself." And a pair of dove-like eyes met his; quietly entreating him to be at peace with himself, and she passed on.

"What! can even such a gentle creature as that have detractors?" said he to himself, ad-

miring her even in the midst of his own confusion. "Well, for more than one reason I have had enough of society for one night," and he moved along with the gay throng, but instead of seeking the supper-room, he made his way at once to the street.

Mrs Lonsdale's triumph was at its height when Mr Dillon gave his envied escort to Flora, and she followed with the talkative Sir Hugh.

"This is another secret of Mrs Bolder's popularity," said Mr Dillon, when he had carefully seated Flora, and was standing in languid attendance behind her chair; "she gives a very good supper."

"How shockingly unromantic," thought Flora; "but I suppose he means a joke," so she smiled that sweet, bewitching smile of hers.

"Why does not—I forget what you call him,—come to supper?"

"Attila?"

"Yes."

“ He has wisely taken himself off, being warned I presume by that great classical example Tittlebat Titmouse, when he sent the spoon through a trifle dish.”

“ How funny you are,” said Flora, admiringly. “ Who was Tittlebat Titmouse ? ”

“ Happy being, if you have his acquaintance yet to make ; I will send you the book to-morrow.”

Greatly to Mrs Lonsdale’s satisfaction, Mr Dillon did not desert her fair charge during the supper, and when it was over it was he who condescended to hand her to the carriage.

“ She will do very well,” thought Mrs Lonsdale, “ very well indeed ; she will get on much better than if she were more clever.”

And with a well-satisfied air she leaned back in the carriage, and in silence allowed Flora to indulge in her reflections, whatever they might be.

CHAPTER XII.

"That 's the letter I writ to her friend."

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

It was one of what Mrs Grant called her bad days ; so she remained in bed, indulging in a dim intention of getting up at some time, which time, as the day wore on, was constantly deferred. Eleanor sat in the afternoon within hearing of her aunt's call, and occupying herself with one of those works which must have the undivided attention or they cannot be read at all. She had selected it on that account, and to a mind like hers

the exercise had been salutary. For a long time she had allowed, or rather had compelled, herself to be engrossed, when she was interrupted by a visit from Flora.

"I have had a parcel from Carstone to-day," she said, "and in it was this for you."

She handed Eleanor a small packet, addressed to her in Henry Mordaunt's handwriting.

"Do n't be disappointed," added Flora. "It looks like a nice present, but it is only poor Jane Jennings's old Prayer Book, which she has sent you for a keepsake. She died on Tuesday."

"Jane Jennings dead!"

"Yes, poor thing. Henry was with her, because Uncle James was away at the Bishop's. She wanted that book sent to you, so he told me that he had enclosed it for you."

"Jane Jennings dead! That poor blighted heart at rest!—"

"Yes, Henry was so kind to her."

“But I thought he was in the North?”

“So he was, but he came back just for a short time to settle about the duty, and he goes off again to-day. Isn't it nice that I should happen to have such a change while he is away?”

“You like Bath, then?”

“Oh, yes, of course I do; very much indeed. What a pity you were not at Lady Crampton's last night. Such a party! even better than Mrs Bolder's. The Marquis of Clare was there. She knows everybody worth knowing. What a delightful man Mr Dillon is; he was there, of course; and you can't think how cross Miss Tryon Jones looked because he talked to me nearly all the evening, and the Miss Furnivalls were quite spiteful when we were coming away, and prevented my finding my opera cloak when I was in such a hurry, and my aunt waiting. She says that the jealousy and envy of the girls here is past everything. I am sure it was n't my fault that Mr Dillon would talk so much

to me ; I could n't tell him to go away, could I ?”

“But beware of him, dear Flora. I am afraid he is that dangerous kind of flirt who appears to pay serious attention when he is only trifling,—a character not desirable for any girl to have much to do with, even if she were free.”

Flora pursed up her mouth, and slightly tossed her head, and thought how well this remark tallied with an insinuation from Mrs George as to Eleanor's jealousy. “Perhaps you think Mr Lepel dangerous, too?” she added in a tone intended to be arch, but which was in reality a little spiteful.

“Not in the least,” returned Eleanor, with an amused smile ; “his flatteries could no more deceive a woman than a fly made by a child could a fish.”

“Really you have a strange opinion of people,” said Flora, not a little mortified at finding those she considered as her own particular admirers given to the public at large.

"I am going to the ball on Monday," she observed after a pause, and bringing this in as a little revenge upon Eleanor, who had strongly advised her not to go.

Eleanor had already urged all that she could upon the subject of the ball, so she received this intelligence without making any reply. She knew too well the stratum of obstinacy which lay beneath the light mould on the surface of Flora's character.

"Now do n't look cross about it; I am not afraid of dangerous people if you are," and she rose to leave. "But do tell me, Eleanor, please, before I go, what Mr Dillon means, when he is always calling a rough-looking young man Attila. I do n't like to ask him, because it would look so stupid, but do tell me, what *does* he mean? Was Attila a man in an Opera, or *what*?"

Whatever enlightenment Eleanor might have furnished with regard to "the destroyer of nations," the hardy victor of the North, was

stopped by a summons to Flora, brought in haste by Mrs Lonsdale's maid.

"Mr Dillon is in the drawing-room, ma'am, and Mr Lepel."

Forgetting all about Attila, Flora readily departed, having first given Eleanor an invitation to accompany her, so very much in Mrs George's own manner, when she offered what was not meant to be accepted, that Eleanor was almost tempted to that smile of contempt of which she had almost cured herself.

For a little time she suffered the packet from Carstone to remain by her side unopened, for she continued to think of Flora; and the more she thought the more uneasy she became. Then from becoming too serious; by a natural revulsion, she, for a while, quieted her fears completely. What nonsense to give way to such exaggeration; a little levity, the consequence of flattery and novelty; and Flora, under the powerful influence of Henry Mordaunt, would be all right again. Having

arrived at this conclusion, she remembered her little parcel, and opened it. There was the brightly-bound little Prayer Book of poor Jane, bought only as an accession to the rest of her Sunday finery, but beyond that uncared for, until from its pages Eleanor had poured balm into the broken spirit. It was a precious legacy, what could be better? Poor Jane!—she took up the book—ha—what was that? A note was beneath it—a note addressed to her by Henry Mordaunt. What could he have to say to her? What that could not be sent in a message through Flora? She looked at the note before she broke the seal. She had a kind of instinctive dislike to it, as though she knew beforehand that its contents would not please her. At last she opened and read :

“My dear Eleanor,

“For I venture thus to address you, because I look forward to find in you a most valued cousin and friend. From the complete

reliance I have both in your tact and judgment, I write a few lines to you upon a most delicate subject, about which, however, I feel that I may venture to speak to you, without any fear of being misunderstood. I am sorry to say that business will oblige me, when I quit this, to remain away from Steyne much longer than I intended, and this interval I believe Flora has agreed to spend with her aunt in Bath. I cannot say that with regard to one so young and guileless I altogether approve of this arrangement, while at the same time I felt that it would be unkind to oppose it, as she is enjoying the change, which, while it has its disadvantages, has also its advantages, as it will open her mind. It is to you that I trust, to your sense and influence in counteracting all that may possibly be injurious to her in her short taste of a life of gaiety ; you will watch over her as a sister ; you will be ever near her, making her pass through the dangerous atmosphere of admiration unharmed. You cannot think how happy

I am in the thought that she is in the same house with you. You will not, I feel assured, think my writing to you upon this subject strange. You will pardon a lover's anxiety, even if it should appear overstrained, for that which is so precious must be sacredly guarded. I enclose you poor Jane's last gift; she ever spoke of you (as who does not?) with affection and respect.

" Believe me ever

" Most sincerely yours,

" Henry Mordaunt."

" P. S. I need scarcely beg you not to mention to Flora that you have heard from me."

This postscript was in smaller characters, and not so legible as the rest of the letter, written as people write when they are a little doubtful, or a little ashamed of what they say.

* * * * *

Sometimes a feeling or a delusion which has

held us in captivity passes away, as in our latitude darkness passes from the earth so imperceptibly that we mark not the time when the twilight begins, or when that in turn retreats before the full breaking of the day. Sometimes, but much more rarely, conviction bursts upon us as rises the sun in that clime where twilight is almost unknown.

The letter has dropped from Eleanor's hand, and a film has passed from her eyes,—she is now looking at the real, not at the ideal, for that most dangerous idol of any human heart has vanished away. What was there in the words of Henry Mordaunt that had produced such an effect upon her,—nay, what was there not? He had not written one sentence that was not unpleasant to her; she had read each with a disapprobation bordering upon contempt, for a woman is never more tempted to despise than where she has too highly estimated. Most distasteful of all were the high compliments paid to herself, by a man who had once given

her all but his declared devotion ; and then that postscript,—was she who abhorred concealment in any shape to receive a letter from Flora's affianced husband, which must not be mentioned to her ? Yet she *must* be silent, for nothing could be to Flora more galling than this appeal to herself. Why was he so ungenerous, so selfish, so *weak*, as to place her in the awkward position of a secret counsellor ? No, that no man should have the power to do, she would admit of no such position ; she would take no notice of this letter, for whatever her answer might be, from such a ready writer as he was, it would produce a reply ; no second link should be added to this one to make up in time the chain of a confidence so much to be condemned. “What should I do,” thought she, “if I were engaged to a man who discovered his want of reliance in me to another ? Surely my scorn would scorch up all that I had of love till it was reduced to ashes.”

* * * * *

And were these the thoughts which she should indulge? she who had made a covenant with herself to strive for a more lowly and lenient spirit; she who had found in herself so much of weakness and of evil as to make her slow to judge. Henry Mordaunt had written to confide in her, from the fearfulness of his great affection, from the tenderness which makes a mother almost humbly beg the watchful care of others for her children when she is absent from them; she would do as he wished, she had intended always to do it without his asking, but no discussions upon the subject should ever be allowed between them. No thought of his about Flora should be suffered to be made known to her. The character of the woman who was to be his wife should be canvassed before his own heart alone; why had he such a habit of leaning upon the opinion of others? And she remembered clearly how he used to rest upon her judgment in almost every matter. This must be never again. If

now he could not satisfy himself, Flora must satisfy him,—none else.

Yet though I am awake, she thought, I dare not “despise my dream.”

* * * * *

“*A gentleman.*”

This was the abrupt announcement of Mary, who, when in one of her “tempers,” found her memory very defective as to the names of strangers.

Eleanor started, and then recovering herself, looked up as she supposed to greet Mr Curtis, who was the only gentleman she at the moment thought likely to appear. The raised eyes fell upon Sir Allan Mountjoy, who was approaching her with an appearance of hesitation, like one who is fearful of intruding, for at a glance he had taken in the opened letter, the flushed cheek, the eye too bright, and the abstracted air.

“I fear I am interrupting you,” he stammered, in a state of very unnecessary confusion, “you are busy, you have letters to write.”

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you," she replied with evident frankness, "do sit down, I am very glad to see you."

He did sit down, and when he had done so, looked fixedly into his hat and said nothing.

"How is Herr Schlegel?" asked Eleanor.

"Better, thank you."

"I suppose the milder weather agrees with him?"

"I think it does."

"Has he been out to-day?"

"Yes, I have just been with him round the Park."

"Have you tried the Warminster road?"

"No."

"It is very pretty and sunny, and would be a change for an invalid."

"I will go there to-morrow."

A pause.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Eleanor, with a smile.

"The matter with me!" he echoed in a startled tone.

"Yes, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"Then there ought to be."

"Why?"

"Because you are neglecting the duty of the present moment."

"What can you mean?"

"Why, your present duty is to entertain me, and you are doing nothing of the kind."

"I am in a stupid humour, that is all."

"But that is no excuse."

"Surely it is: people can't help their moods, you know."

"Yes, they can, and in fashionable life they *must*. When you make a call, you must not only take your best hat and gloves, but your best mind must be prepared for the occasion."

Sir Allan gave a sudden merry laugh, and

shook back from his forehead his profusion of long, thick hair.

"Then I will profit by your advice, and, if you will help me, I will try to get my mind ready for my next call."

"Then you came not caring what mood you bestowed upon us."

"Oh no," he returned with gravity, "I came here because I felt that I wanted a friend."

"Indeed," said Eleanor, with equal seriousness. "In what can we be of service to you?"

"I am sure I do n't know."

"Why, what a strange being you are."

"I beg your pardon, so I am. How is Mrs Grant?"

"Thank you, she is not well to-day, and is not equal to leaving her room. She will, I am sure, be sorry to have missed the pleasure of seeing you."

"Oh! that is a rule in society, is it not, for people always to say that they are sorry when they do n't see you?"

“ It is something of the kind,” said Eleanor, with a look of amusement, “ but when the expression passes between old friends, it may sometimes be believed.”

“ I am afraid you think me very rude.”

“ By no means. I am myself rather fond of analysing and examining those things which many persons pass over as mere matters of form. I fancy from your tone just now, that you find much of what is called life here made up of hollowness and deception.”

“ No indeed. When I meet with things that I do not understand, I am slow to condemn.”

Eleanor involuntarily bowed her head before the humble wisdom of this remark. “ What did you mean,” she asked, after a short silence, “ by saying that you wanted a friend? Are you in any difficulty ? ”

“ Yes, Elea— yes, Miss Stuart, I am always in difficulty, every day something comes to show me— you know what.”

Eleanor raised her eyes and gave him a full, stedfast look, such as she always gave when she was greatly in earnest. "Nothing need ever be a difficulty to a spirit like yours."

"But it is. You cannot understand what I feel, it is impossible that you should. What to you is as natural as breathing or walking, is to me strange and unpleasant,—nay, I must go further, and say hateful. I would rather be wrecked in the wildest sea, or head a Forlorn Hope, or do anything that is desperate, than face society such as I find it here."

"Then why do you give yourself so much pain?"

"Because it is my duty. Why should you ask? You who ought to be the first to tell me that it is," and his eye flashed with an energy that was akin to anger. "Am I to sit down ignorant and confused as to anything that befits the station to which I have been called? Am I like a coward to turn my back upon that part of the battle-field of life to which I have

been ordered, because it would suit me best to fight in another? No, for the sake of the good he might do, and the influence he might gain, for his own sake, and for the sake of those yet unborn, Allan Mountjoy must be a gentleman, and he *shall*."

Eleanor might have said "he is one already." She might have said many other things which she really felt, but a something told her that at that moment they would be out of place. She was silent.

"Pardon me," he said, his tone changing. "I pain you by these revelations of my inner self, but it seems so natural to talk to you again just as one feels."

"How can you say that you want a friend," replied Eleanor, "with such sentiments and the will to carry them out? You are your own best friend."

"Ah!" said he, smiling, "it is very easy, you know, to have an heroic flight, and to say what we will do and what we dare to do, but

when it comes to practice it is another thing. Soon after I leave you, some ridiculous trifle will upset my self-sufficiency, and I shall need as much reasoning and fortitude to be myself again as though I had met with some great misfortune."

"Never mind, study fashionable life as you would a science, calmly and carefully, and it will soon be easy to you."

"And yet it is a science which many have pined to master, but beginning late have never done so. I do not make any remark upon your expression 'fashionable life,' because though I did not mean that exactly, you are quite aware that I did not."

Eleanor slightly coloured. When we are on delicate ground, perhaps it is a fault to be too delicate.

"Those who have not mastered the science," she replied, "have none of nature's nobility. The vulgar at heart are too arrogant and presuming to learn, and therefore they fail."

"True, I thank you for that distinction, and now I am going to ask you to be so kind—"

"Miss Curryer."

And that lady entered the room, giving a sharp look of curiosity at Sir Allan, beginning at the wild, shaggy hair, and ending at the unfashionable boot. "What a man for Bath, to be sure!" thought she, as he advanced to Eleanor to bid her a hasty adieu. Nervously retreating, he awkwardly struck Miss Curryer's bonnet with the handle of his umbrella, and then, with a confused bow and no further apology, he left the room.

"Miss Stuart, my dear, why don't you teach your *beaux* to have their hair cut, and *not* to bring their umbrellas into the room with them?"

This observation was overheard by its unfortunate object, who was detained some little time in the passage by Mary, to listen to a very polite and elaborate message from Mrs Grant, greatly mangled in the delivery.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired:
Bid her come forth."—WALLER.

"HERE we are, my love, I am sure you will be charmed."

And the fly drew up at the carriage entrance to the Assembly Rooms.

Flora followed her aunt through the group of spectators always collected on a ball night to see the company pass in.

They walked along what seemed to Flora passages of an interminable length, where every foot-fall made a peculiar sound upon the sanded

floor, and where gusts of cold air came from every quarter.

"Take care of your dress, my dear, and wrap your opera cloak well round you, for these floors are horridly dusty, and most of the colds in Bath are caught from the draughts here."

They went on until they came to an open, well-lighted space, where entrances on all sides to cloak-rooms, and tea-room, and card-room, and octagon-room were enough to puzzle the uninitiated.

"This way, ladies," said an upright official, waving his hand in the direction of the ladies' cloak-room, with that great politeness of manner which belongs to every class in Bath.

"Thank you," returned Mrs George, most graciously, but she did not immediately take advantage of the unnecessary information. She stopped with an appearance of securing her bracelet, and the pause gave time for two

gentlemen in cloaks and caps to come up to them.

“ Ah, Sir Hugh ; ah, Mr Dillon, well met ; our guardian angel has sent you, I am sure, to save us the trouble of getting our own tickets. Here, there’s a good creature,” and she slid her portemonnaie into Mr Dillon’s hand, “ get them for us. We won’t keep you waiting any very dreadful time. I am sure my little Flory won’t stand long before that glass in the cloak-room, for it is the most unbecoming I ever looked into.”

“ You ought to have Lepel here,” said Mr Dillon, with a slight curl of his handsome lip, “ to protest that no glass could give an unpleasing reflection to Miss Lonsdale.”

“ ’Pon my honour,” said Sir Hugh, “ if that is n’t too bad, as if we wanted Lepel here, indeed, to tell the truth, that these ladies need not turn away from any glass that was ever manufactured.”

“Well, upon that pretty speech we will leave you,” said the smiling Mrs George. Flora was smiling too, but she said nothing. She was beginning to feel that, like the beau in Nydia’s song, she had “but to shine.” No more was needed from her.

“Thank you. Yes, put them both together,” said Mrs George to one of the cloak-women, with the taking, gracious smile she liberally bestowed upon all the attendants in lieu of a gratuity.

“How do you do? how do you do?” exclaimed a diminutive girl, with a very animated manner, who jumped up from her seat by the fire, and shook Mrs Lonsdale’s hand. “I am so weary of waiting here for Mrs Gander. I have been sitting here more than half an hour, and I am sure a polka that I was engaged for must have been danced long ago.”

“*You* engaged before you entered the room,” thought Flora, who was fast imbibing that scorn of the pretensions of others which is

often one of the snares of triumphant beauty. She had suffered her cloak to be taken from her shoulders by the ready attendant ; and she was standing in what she had been told (and she believed it to the very letter) was all the glory of her loveliness. The perfection of beauty and the perfection of dress, that was what she felt (poor vain heart!) that she possessed ; and from this eminence she looked down upon that curious little figure claiming intimacy with her aunt, and the eye which scanned so superciliously saw a short girl with a slight figure, much too thin for any of the wavy lines of beauty, eyes that had no attraction save their animation, and hair very pale in colour and very scanty, whose only recommendation was its neat arrangement. She wore a dress of black net, which had seen much service ; it was trimmed with small bright flowers tastefully arranged, and on her head was a wreath to match.

"Miss Pettigrew, my dear, this is my niece," said Mrs Lonsdale, giving the girls a slight sort of introduction, and then turning away to give a careful look at the glass.

Flora followed her example, and gave no more attention to her new acquaintance than a distant bow. She had learned to be very observant of Mrs Lonsdale's manner to those about her, and her own was regulated by it.

* * * * *

"Her guardian angel, indeed!" said Mr Dillon, sneeringly, after he had laid down the money for the tickets, "I doubt if such beings accompany us to a place like this, Barton?"

"I am sure I do n't know, Dillon, and I certainly do n't trouble my head about it. I dare say I am as good in one place as in another. I never find much difference."

"Heigho!" sighed Mr Dillon, with a look of lazy weariness.

"What, yawning before the evening is begun? Now confess the truth; you are put

out because Mrs Lonsdale has been too sharp for you, and has secured you as gentleman in waiting."

"Oh no, nothing of the kind. I don't consider it any hardship to escort the prettiest girl in Bath into the ball-room. I should have done it of my own accord, if it had entailed no trouble."

"I beg your pardon," said both gentlemen simultaneously, as they stepped aside to make way for a gentleman and two ladies.

"Miss Cathcart grows thinner and paler than ever," remarked Sir Hugh, when they had passed on. "And she was once your prettiest girl in Bath."

Mr Dillon made no reply, and stood pulling on his left-hand glove, and making it fit to every finger with the minutest care.

"Naughty men, slovenly creatures!" exclaimed Mrs George, rousing him by a tap with her fan, "instead of meeting us at the door, here you are; Flora is quite shocked.

She says that the country gentlemen have twice your gallantry."

Flora by this time readily acquiesced in having sayings attributed to her which she had never made, and some who found her very dull in conversation were beguiled into thinking that she was in reality very witty and observant behind the scenes.

"I hope she won't punish us by going back to the country then," said Sir Hugh, in his loud, clear voice.

Mr Dillon vouchsafed no speech, but he gave a lazy curve of his arm towards Flora, which intimated that she was to take it,—and she did take it readily, ay proudly. She, the chosen of a devoted heart, was proud of this man's public attention, however offered, because, in this small world of Bath, he was 'the glass of fashion,' and to enter the ball-room with him would rank her amongst the *crème de la crème* of the place.

And well satisfied did Mrs Lonsdale lead

the way, leaning upon the arm of Sir Hugh Barton, and well satisfied must have been some spirit of evil too, who walks unheeded and unseen in many a procession of the poor, misguided children of humanity.

They entered the octagon-room, so admirably adapted for the reception of company, that it would repay a stranger's trouble to come early and watch the arrival of gay groups composed of individuals, some beaming with loveliness and buoyant in step, some wearied and jaded, and some bearing a peculiar character of their own, those independent beings whose first view of the world could not dazzle, nor its further acquaintance disgust.

Near one of the fire-places, with his arms crossed, stood a silent observer, with thoughts in his heart deep and stirring, which could have found no vent to any human being.

With what a conceited step did Flora tread along the smoothly-carpeted floor, with those little feet which Mr Lepel had told her only

the night before fell "like dew on the gowan lying." Henry Mordaunt, with all his love, must have a very dull perception of her graces, for how many had been commented upon, since she had been in Bath, to which he had never appeared to give a thought!

"My dear, I must introduce you to Captain Corbett," said Mrs George, whose own hand had just been released from the would-be cordial shake of the M. C. He received her with marked politeness, seeing that it was Mr Dillon's arm upon which she leaned, but the observer near the fire-place noted how forced were his smiles, and how ill-disguised was the weariness with which, having exchanged a few unmeaning words with this party, he turned to greet the next. "Ah!" thought he, "how wearisome all that must be,—the same thing over and over again. I think I know exactly what he feels." Then the watcher's eyes fell upon another advancing group, and the look of curious observation was changed to one of

mingled pity and pain. An old lady superbly dressed, with costly jewels glittering on her wrinkled skin, was carefully escorted by an elderly gentleman with a star, whose attention appeared as devoted as if it had been given in homage to the first flush of youth and beauty.

“My dear, *dear* Lady Crampton!” exclaimed Mrs George, enthusiastically, turning from the accounts which Mr Dillon was giving to that charming listener, Flora, of those whose full-length portraits adorned the walls. “My dear Lady Crampton, how charmed I am to find that your cold is so much better as to allow of your being here to-night. My first look in the cloak-room was for you, and I was so disappointed at not seeing you.”

Her affectionate pressure of the hand was rewarded by an introduction, which for the last month had been the first object of her wishes.

“Mrs Lonsdale, the Marquis of Donegal,—the Marquis of Donegal, Mrs Lonsdale.”

What sound of dulcet harmony could equal the sweet music of those words !

Mrs George was not a woman upon whom any worldly opportunity was ever thrown away. She quickly ingratiated herself into the good graces of the Marquis, or, at least, obtained such an open appearance of them as served her purpose quite as well. The two parties joined and entered the ball-room together. At a little distance followed the silent observer, and he then stood amongst a group of men who were stationed near the entrance, either unable to procure partners, or too lazy or too indifferent to seek them. Lady Crampton and Mrs Lonsdale seated themselves in the front row at the top of the room. The Marquis of Donegal did not dance, and Sir Hugh Barton only danced quadrilles, so, much to the satisfaction of Mrs George, these gentlemen remained in attendance.

“ I am sure I shan’t be able to dance round this great room, and people look as if they

must be knocked down, and I know Henry does not wish me to dance the polka."

This passed in a tremulous whisper from Flora to Mrs George.

"Nonsense, do n't be a goose," was the hurried reply. "Do you wish Mr Dillon to think you a prude?"

No, certainly,—poor Flora only wished Mr Dillon to continue to think her all that was charming, and so the offered arm was at once taken, and she had joined the dancers. Mr Dillon never gave himself too much fatigue; so, when they had reached the bottom of the room, he stopped, and drew his fair partner aside from the couples quickly following.

"She is very lovely," thought the observer, whose eye now rested upon her. "I wish she were anywhere but here. I suppose," he continued to think, "people work out their own destinies. Can others help them much or harm them much?" and the self-asked question soon involved him in a labyrinth of reflec-

tions, little suited to the gay scene passing before his eyes. A lazy partner was this Frederick Dillon with whom every girl was so anxious to dance. After a few more turns he took Flora a tour of the rooms,—showed her the Dowagers at their card tables, and everything that was to be seen, and talked very well about it all, and Flora agreed to everything he said, and showed an acquiescing amiability, which made her beauty appear to great advantage. Pointless nonsense and pointed wit had both been tried upon Mr Dillon in all their varieties, but nothing could suit his present humour so well as this worshipping silence. What could be better in woman than a delicate appreciation of man's superiority, too deeply felt for the parade of confession? What more like the simplicity and perfection of the primeval Eve, who felt all her loveliness surpassed by that "wisdom which alone is truly fair?"

"How can people sit down to those nasty

cards?" inquired Flora, stopping his reflections when they had arrived at this unusual pitch, for Frederick Dillon had tried to shake hands with poetising and idealising a very long time ago.

"Look at them, poor old things," he answered. "What else can they do?"

Flora did not bore him with any sentiments about the dignity and importance of old age, its power for good, and its wisdom, and chastened beauty. Nor did she, as Miss Tryon Jones might have done, quote from an article in the *Quarterly Review*, and assure him that its writer considered no object so lovely as a fine old woman, with everything in keeping with her age. She simply echoed his words—

"Poor old things."

And in what appeared perfect unison of opinion they left the card-room.

During their absence a waltz and a quadrille had succeeded the polka, and yet in all that time it had not occurred to Flora that she, who

now belonged exclusively to one, had allowed another to engross too much of her attention.

"You naughty creature," was Mrs George's salutation to Mr Dillon when they rejoined their party, "you have been running away with my little pet, while half-a-dozen men waiting to dance with her have been on the borders of despair. I never saw Mr Lepel out of temper before, and positively he showed it too. Really, my dear, you *must* dance this polka with the poor fellow, or he won't recover it all the evening. You must not say you are engaged. Now, Mr Dillon, say she is not."

"She is not," said Mr Dillon, quietly, as he allowed her to take her seat by her *chaperon*. Flora was piqued.

Mr Lepel was soon by her side, and with one of his ready flatteries he restored her smiles, and she was again amongst the dancers. About every third dance she found herself

engaged to him, and his very pretty speeches made him more acceptable to her than any intervening partner. Still amidst flatteries and attentions there was one alloy. Mr Dillon had not again approached her, had not again afforded her an opportunity of triumphing over the ill-concealed chagrin of the Misses Furnivall, and the supposed anger of the independent Miss Tryon Jones. Ah, Flora, Flora, have a care, the world is indeed "*infectious*," and you are sickening with a dire disease.

Mrs George Lonsdale was at the height of enjoyment, so adroitly had she amused Lord Donegal, that he had not once left her side; and Lady Crampton, spite of her heavy cold, was entertained and kept awake by her quizzing and liveliness. She pronounced it one of the most charming balls of the season, as the trio, well-pleased with each other, adjourned to the tea-room, and took possession of a snug little table all to themselves.

"Where is your fair charge?" asked the Marquis, "we see too little of her."

"The marvel is if we see anything. How ridiculous the men are, to be sure, running after my simple, little country flower. Having no children of my own, I had her here that we might be a little, quiet, rational company to each other, but there does not seem much chance of that at present. Heigho! I suppose young people must enjoy themselves."

"Of course they must," said Lady Crampton. "Ah! there is Mr Dillon—who is that with him?"

"That," returned Mrs George, looking with some surprise across, at the large tea-table, "is a Miss Pettigrew."

"How nice it is to ask you a question, dear Mrs Lonsdale, you always answer it."

"Ought to have you on the ministerial benches then," said the Marquis, and Mrs George laughed a full appreciation of his observation.

“ And who is Miss Pettigrew ? ” continued Lady Crampton.

“ Nobody.”

“ And what is her attraction, for Mr Dillon is putting some sugar into her tea ? ”

“ Not any that *I* can see,” observed the Marquis, looking at her deliberately through his eye-glass.

“ But she must have some,” persisted Lady Crampton.

“ We will send for Mr Layard, and request him to excavate it,” said the Marquis, sipping his tea with the complacency of a man who is conscious of having said a good thing.

“ Marquis, ~~you~~ will be the death of me,” observed the laughing Mrs George.

“ But there must be something in her, or he would not have put the sugar into her tea,” continued Lady Crampton, with childish pertinacity, pursuing her one idea.

“ Well, here you are at last, my love ; have you had any tea ? ” asked Mrs George of Flora,

as she approached them on the arm of the assiduous Mr Lepel.

“We have been better engaged than in drinking tea,” answered Mr Lepel; “the music to-night is glorious, and I have felt as if I were in the Elysian fields, dancing with a Zephyr.”

“Oh, dear, do you like dancing in fields? I don’t like it at all, grass is so heavy; I like boards best, or smooth holland,” returned Flora, simply.

My Lord Marquis smiled inwardly, and laid this answer by on a safe shelf in his memory, to be produced hereafter.

Another speech from Mr Lepel, as he handed Flora some tea, was unheeded, for her attention had been attracted to the spot where Mr Dillon and Miss Pettigrew were standing together.

“Ah, my dear,” said Lady Crampton, observing the direction of her eyes, “perhaps you can tell us something about Miss Pettigrew.

Do you know, just now Mr Dillon put some sugar into her tea."

"Perhaps she is a fortune," remarked Flora, with some asperity.

"I think not," said Mr Lepel, and then, lowering his voice, he added, "at all events, he cannot say 'sweets to the sweet' so appropriately as I can now," and he deposited some sugar very softly in Flora's cup.

This old compliment, though quite new to Flora, did not restore her equanimity. The vanity of a weak mind is bounded by no rules of reason; Flora had expected Mr Dillon's attentions to have been devoted to herself for the evening, knowing, at the same time, full well that she had no right to appreciate or allow them.

"I have been waiting all the evening for the honour," exclaimed Sir Hugh Barton, as he joined them, and offered Flora his arm, to induce her to join the quadrille now forming.

The whole party rose to follow, and Lady

Crampton felt her tottering steps supported, and her trembling arm resting on a firm strong one, which was not that of the Marquis of Donegal.

"Dear me, Allan, how you startled me," she said, looking up. "I did not know that you were here, I thought you would not come."

"You said I had better come, and I am here."

"Very good of you, I am sure, and you are quite right; a young man can't see too much of the world. I will introduce you presently to the Marquis of Donegal, and to my sweet friend, Mrs George Lonsdale."

"If you please."

"She is dying to be introduced."

"Is she?"

"Have you seen her lovely niece?"

"I have."

"What a pity that she is engaged to be married."

"A pity! Why, Mr Mordaunt is all that can be desired, at least I hear that he is."

"But such a pretty girl as that might do almost anything."

"I do n't think so, but you know the world better than I do."

"But, Allan, do n't you see how all the gentlemen are admiring her?"

"Yes, poor thing! I do."

"Did you say 'poor thing?' I am getting a little deaf."

"I did."

"She ought to marry well, and to be presented at Court, and to have her picture in the Book of Beauty, and in the Royal Academy; I told her aunt so just now."

"Dear aunt, do n't tell her so again. Let her go back to the country, and be happy while it is in her power."

"Dear me, what odd notions you have, but I do n't want to sit down here, out of the way in the Octagon-room; I want to join my friends and to introduce you to them."

“No, sit here quietly with me for a short time, I want your company.”

Gratified by this, the old lady sat down, and her eye rested on the fine, though strange-looking young man by her side, who had said, “I want your company,” and she, who was standing on the brink of the grave with the old yearning for affection unsatisfied, was strangely soothed.

These two beings, who appeared so uncongenial, remained sometime together, and Lady Crampton was insensibly led to talk and even to think of other things than those which concerned exclusively her present world of Bath. At last some observation of her companion's made her feel restless, for her mind, long accustomed to trifles, turned with a weak horror from any serious thought. “Come now,” she said, “we must go into the ball-room, and you ought to be dancing and paying your devotions to the ladies.”

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"But I do n't dance, and there is no lady here to whom I am devoted."

"But, my dear boy, you must dance, and you must be attentive, without minding what you feel."

"Must I? I will think about that when I go home."

"What a home you have here to be sure! Why do n't you leave that tiresome old man with a respectable nurse from the hospital, and ride about and enjoy yourself as a young man of your family and fortune should? You, a Mountjoy, ought to be with the best company of the place, with Mr Dillon and the Marquis of Donegal and Sir Hugh Barton, and all that clique; and instead of that, you are always creeping along by a Bath chair, with an old invalid who is always grumbling."

Without saying a word he rose and offered her his arm.

"Why do n't you dance?" she asked, after

they had nearly crossed the room in silence. He made no reply.

“You should never be too cross to answer a lady.”

He bent down and kindly pressed the poor old withered hand that rested on his arm.

“I am not cross,—I beg your pardon. What did you ask me?”

“Oh, Allan, Allan, you should never be absent; do, my dear boy, read Chesterfield’s Letters.”

And in a state of dismay as to the social deficiencies of the last of the Mountjoys, Lady Crampton tottered into the ball-room.

CHAPTER XIV.

“Yet, for your part, it not appears to me
That you should have an inch of any ground
To build a grief on.”—*King Henry IV.*

AFTER an evening of such triumphant success as had filled with envy the hearts of some who were, or had been, or who could never hope to be, *belles* of Bath, how did Flora's eyes open upon the morning light? With a discontented spirit and a fevered brow she rose. Why was this? How many last night had watched her, and repined because no sip of that cup of flattery and pleasure had been granted to

them, which had been offered to her lips filled to the brim? How many in their timid and disappointed obscurity had looked upon the admired Miss Lonsdale as a being too bright and happy for sorrow or chagrin to have the power to touch?

“I say, Dillon, who is your partner for this last polka?”

“Little Miss Pettigrew.”

“I thought you would be engaged to Miss Lonsdale.”

“No, her polka is heavy, and has those little old-fashioned hops that fidget a man to death.”

“I knew you would say so. What a pity she does not go to Mrs Werter, who would soon cure her of those awful hops.”

These words passing between Mr Dillon and Mr Lepel had been overheard by the “Zephyr;” they had poisoned her evening’s enjoyment, they had been thought of the last thing before

she closed her eyes at night, and the first when she opened them in the morning.

Ah, Flora, be wise, take this first lesson, bitter as it is, to heart, and learn once for all that those who most assiduously admire and flatter us to our faces, are the first to notice our "awful hops" when our backs are turned.

But Flora was not wise. She was angry and mortified, and out of humour, but that was all.

When she came down to her very late breakfast, she found a letter from Henry Mordaunt waiting beside her plate. She felt in no haste to open it, and went on with her breakfast without seeking refreshment from those words of sincere affection which are so sweet and strengthening when woman's heart is in a healthy tone.

Mrs Lonsdale's first observation was not calculated to clear the cloud from Flora's brow.

"Flora, I must give you a hint. Don't

venture upon joking, it is a dangerous weapon, and even if you knew how to manage it, you do n't require it."

"How, how? what do you mean?" returned Flora, with a look of vacant surprise.

"You persisted in pointing out Sir Allan Mountjoy to Lady Crampton as the King of the Huns, and you would not take the hint when I said you meant that stiff, old gentleman who was standing by him; now remember in future that what I say you mean you *do* mean."

"But what harm was there in my calling him the King of the Huns? Mr Dillon always does."

"Mr Dillon never would do it before Lady Crampton, as Sir Allan Mountjoy is her own nephew."

"Dear! dear!" was all Flora could reply.

"Yes, and now always bear in mind that I never say anything without a motive, and that you must be careful to take my cue."

"Dear! dear! do you think Lady Crampton is very much offended?"

"Of course she must feel hurt. Did you not see Sir Hugh Barton's look? That was enough to show you that you were on the wrong tack."

Poor Flora had seen it, but she had interpreted it into admiring amusement at her vivacity.

"Nothing so awkward as this has occurred since I have been in Bath. You repeated the observation three times, to be quite certain that Lady Crampton heard you, and all the gentlemen round us were smiling to each other," continued Mrs George, determined to impress upon Flora the fact that henceforth she must follow her lead.

"Dear me, dear me!" exclaimed Flora, beginning to cry.

"Now don't do that," remonstrated Mrs George. "I will see what can be done, my dear, leave it to me. I have a way somehow

of getting out of everything ; but do n't cry, you will spoil your eyes for Jullien's concert."

Flora obeyed, and with some difficulty restrained her tears. When, presently, she was left alone she opened the letter so long overlooked. Ah, how uncongenial to her present mood were its sentiments, how measured appeared its expressions of affection after the high-flown adulation of the previous evening ; and how distasteful its schemes of benevolence, for the bracing vigorous air of the North had instilled into Henry Mordaunt's mind new plans and new ideas, asking for sympathy, which she was bound to afford ; so she set to work with her paper before her, and her pen dipped many times in the ink, before she could begin ; and then filling the first page with an account of her sad headache, she got on as well as she could,—making unsatisfactory general observations, expressing herself charmed with this idea and delighted with that, and quite sure that one project would succeed, and that

another would do a great deal of good, &c. She felt that this must do, for how could she enter into a plan for a local Savings' Bank, to be in connection with a metropolitan one as secure as the Bank of England, when the safest provision for the old age of all the inhabitants of Steyne was as dust in the balance to her just then, compared with the criticism on her polka, and the displeasure of Lady Crampton?

After lunch Mr Dillon lounged in, as Mrs George had managed to secure him as an escort to the concert. Flora was in a dull mood, and received him accordingly.

"I am afraid," said he languidly, throwing himself into the easiest chair in the room, "that you are tired, Miss Lonsdale. I think myself that it was better when they closed the Rooms at twelve. Pleasure becomes more and more of a toil,—I often think of giving it up."

"But you shall not give it up, we could

not get on without you," answered Mrs George with great vivacity.

"Well, Miss Lonsdale, what do you think of that?—do you acknowledge my importance?" said he, in a tone as nearly sarcastic as an indolent one could be.

"Poor little sensitive puss, she can think of nothing, I am sure, this morning, she is so vexed."

"What has happened, then? Is Jullien's concert put off?"

"For shame! you always did think women trifling, and always will, I suppose, so I give you up in that way. No, poor dear, she has lost her interest in the concert, I am afraid, because she is so hurt at having innocently annoyed Lady Crampton."

"Ah, indeed," said the indolent Mr Dillon, not betraying the requisite curiosity.

"Yes," continued Mrs George, not discouraged as many might have been by his apathy. "She has been so struck and amused by

your calling" (Mr Dillon became attentive)
"Sir Allan Mountjoy the King of the Huns,
that she pointed him out under that title
to Lady Crampton last night, not being aware,
poor child, that he is her own nephew."

"Depend upon it, Lady Crampton never
heard the observation."

"But she did; if people are as deaf as a
post they always happen to hear what one
would rather they should not, and so I have
been vainly trying to comfort Flora, for, as
she justly says, the greater the truth the
greater the libel; and the name was too apt to
be easily forgiven, and to have hurt an old
person's feelings has so disturbed her that she
cannot forgive herself."

"Do n't think any more about it," said
Mr Dillon, kindly. "I intend to call on
Lady Crampton, after the concert, to ar-
range about the box for the Amateur Per-
formance, and I will talk about the Fancy
Ball, and tell her what a capital idea I have

heard Sir Allan has of appearing as the King of the Huns,—something quite new, I shall call it, after so many characters have been worn out.”

“Oh! how clever you are!” exclaimed Flora, raising her large blue eyes in admiration.

“What a lovely countenance she has,” thought Mr Dillon, and when they set off for the Rooms “those awful hops” were mutually forgotten. —

* * * * *

Forgotten for a time was the annoyance of the morning, not in the strains of Jullien’s band, not in the sweet entrancing notes of a favourite singer, but in the occasional words of the admired Mr Dillon; above all, in the fact that he was seated by her side, and that some portion of the world of Bath could see and report the sight.

But after Flora had returned home, that polka

was again remembered. What should she do? Could she who had been called a goddess and an angel, and a "phantom of delight," and a peri, and anything else that a man will say, provided he can get a woman to believe him,—could she rest at anything short of perfection? could she suffer in any matter such a dwarfish, plain, unprepossessing creature as Miss Pettigrew to be preferred before her? Impossible! Besides, to have done anything against her conscience, and not to charm in doing it,—could anything be more mortifying?

On the other hand—(that other hand, what hard blows it gives us sometimes)—on the other hand, how could she, who had willingly promised when she should be a wife to give up dancing altogether—she who now would not have any one tell Henry Mordaunt *for the world*, because he was a clergyman and so particular, of her having danced almost every polka at the Rooms last night—how could she have lessons to make herself perfect

in an accomplishment that would be useless to her in future, and write home for money to pay for them ?

Here was a dilemma.

In most dilemmas we seek the counsel of a friend. Flora had two between whom to choose—Eleanor down-stairs, and Mrs George by her side ; the one would oppose that to which she was really inclined, the other would help her to accomplish it ; she selected the latter.

The consequence was that Mrs George at once proposed taking her the next day to be introduced to Mrs Werter, at that lady's Wednesday Academy ; when, if she admired her style, she might make an arrangement for taking private lessons.

This being fixed, Flora wrote the following letter to Carstone.

“ My dear Mamma,

“ In great haste I sit down to give you a few lines, because I must soon dress for a

party at Mrs Hannay's in the Circus. I am told she gives *such* nice parties; I have not yet been to one at her house, and I am sure I should enjoy this one *so much*, but for one thing,—I must tell you that I have been obliged to waltz and dance the polka. Gentlemen would take *no* refusal, which is very odd, as there are at the Rooms so many girls sitting down, who would be so glad to get up,—my aunt said so several times; but Mr Lepel said that if *I* would not dance, he would not do so again himself all the evening. But only think, after all this I found out that Mr Dillon preferred dancing with an ugly, ill-dressed little dwarf of a Miss Pettigrew, because her polka was better than mine! Now I want to take lessons of Mrs Werter, who is such a love of a teacher, for, as Aunt Lonsdale says, I have begun to dance in Bath, and I *cannot* give it up without being quizzed and looking so odd, and if I dance I must do it well, for I do n't mind telling you the truth, that I am so much looked at

and so much talked about that *anything* I do is remarked upon. Now, could you let me have some money for the lessons?—and Henry need never know of my having them, for, as Aunt Lonsdale says, they are called *private* lessons, and everybody takes them privately. Some gentlemen, she says, wait till the lamps are lighted, that no one may see where they are going. My aunt says that though when I am married I need not dance, still I ought to know the very best way of doing it. There are, you see, some disadvantages in being engaged to a clergyman, for at the Rooms Lady Flower, a married woman, is the best *deux temps* in Bath. Could you send me some money, besides that for the lessons? for my bonnet cost more than I expected, and my aunt says that as I am noticed so much I ought to have another dress,—a simple one would do, she says, to wear in turn, and I must have some white satin boots. Mr. Dillon says he cannot bear the

shoes since the boots came in fashion. Eleanor is thought nothing at all of in Bath, she never goes anywhere. I used to think how fashionable she must be, because she was not afraid of going to Sir Thomas Headington's. She is always boring me with advice, and even wanted me the other day to go back to Carstone. My aunt says she sees *all through it*, and that it is nothing but envy. I should n't have thought that of Eleanor once, but my aunt says, that when I know more of the world, I shall know more what people *are*. Eleanor wanted one day to make me afraid of losing Henry, as if there was any chance of *that*! As I told you before, it is quite ridiculous how jealous the girls here are, sometimes really quite mad with spite, but I only laugh at that, as I know what it means. Yesterday, walking up and down the Royal Crescent, the youngest Miss Furnivall passed me, without even a bow, pretending to be rubbing some mud off her

muff. I am sure I can't help it ; I do nothing to attract gentlemen, but somehow they *will* take notice of me.

"I cannot say any more, I must dress now. With my love to Uncle James, who I hope is well,—I am, my dear Mamma,

"Your affectionate child,

"Flora Lonsdale."

"P.S. We are going to the Amateur Theatricals, in Lady Crampton's box, with such a nice party,—Mr Dillon and Sir Hugh Barton and the Marquis of Donegal (only think of that, Mamma !) and some ladies, and Mr Lepel and his cousin, son of Admiral Sir John Lepel, who, Mr Lepel told me (*such* nonsense, of course I do n't believe it) has stayed in Bath one day longer than he intended, on purpose to be introduced to me to-night. My aunt says that this evening I am to have a sprained ankle, as I had better not dance the polka again till I have had my lessons of Mrs Werter."

CHAPTER XV.

I have consider'd well his loss of time ;
And how he cannot be a perfect man,
Not being try'd and tutor'd in the world.

Two Gentleman of Verona.

“ QUITE ridiculous, I never heard of such a thing; I withhold my belief!” exclaimed Sir Hugh Barton, laughing, as he stood with Mrs George Lonsdale and Flora, at a well-known door in Milsom Street.

“ Well, positively it is the truth, you incredulous creatures, and you must leave us here,” returned Mrs George. “ I tell you,

only married gentlemen are admitted to Mrs Werter's Academy."

"Very well," said Mr Lepel, "then what can be easier than for us to say we are married? Let us do that, Barton, for I cannot allow Miss Lonsdale to vanish from us into this place for two mortal hours. I have heard that the ladies who go in never come out again under that time; either they are so pleased with what they see, or they are afraid of moving, in case Mrs Werter should discover some flaw in their manner of leaving the room,—of course Miss Lonsdale could only be detained by the first reason, as it would be impossible for even Mrs Werter to find a fault in her."

"Then," said Sir Hugh, "if you are for going up, so am I. Bless me, I have headed a charge of cavalry,—I am not afraid of breaking through Mrs Werter's lines."

"No doubt," thought Mrs George, "the rule will be broken for two such fashionable men as these, and their company will give

greater *éclat* to our entrance, and make Mrs Werter more particular in getting Flora perfect," so she made no further opposition.

"Do you hear the trumpets of the enemy?" said Sir Hugh, as they ascended the stairs, and they heard the sound of harp and violin.

"Hush, hush, you must speak very low here, Mrs Werter keeps everybody in order," said Mrs George, shaking her finger playfully at him.

"Let us creep in unobserved," suggested Mr Lepel, "it would be rather awkward to be asked to produce one's marriage certificate."

Who ever did creep into Mrs Werter's presence unobserved? Certainly not the present party; as soon as they appeared at the door, she turned and faced them with an easy, graceful movement, and, after shaking hands with Mrs George, who in her most radiant manner introduced Flora, she politely expressed to the gentlemen her regret that they could not be admitted.

"I thought you only objected to single men," pleaded Mr Lepel, with his very best bow.

Mrs Werter smiled a smile of courteous incredulity.

"We want to see such a pretty sight so much, that I am sure you will not be so cruel as to refuse us," said Sir Hugh Barton, in his off-hand way, which generally carried all before it, at the same time advancing a step further into the room.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Mrs Werter, extending her arm with a queenlike air to bar his further progress, "my rule admits of no exception."

They immediately retreated, making their retrograde movement with many bows, and in some confusion.

"'Pon my honour," said Sir Hugh, as they descended the stairs, "there's a woman for you! as firm as Queen Elizabeth,—I admire her for it, 'pon my honour I do, and if ever I have

the misfortune to get married and have daughters, I'll send them to her, and to no one else."

"What a power there is in manner, Barton, when a woman is entirely mistress of herself. I could not have entered if I had had Cromwell's soldiers at my back."

Mrs George and Flora, bereft of their attendant beaux, soon found themselves seated in a line of anxious or admiring mammas, eagerly watching every movement of their children, some thinking what a shame it was for any fault to be found with their perfect darlings; and others, who were rather in the minority, feeling that, when their darlings should be perfect, the necessity for their being there would cease. Flora at first looked with envy at fairy-like little creatures, trained from earliest childhood in so good a school for grace, but she would not suffer her envy to last long. What cause had she for such a feeling? Was not she herself all that could be admired? (she had been told so many times, and she be-

lieved it). A few lessons, a very few, and she would be perfect. Had she not heard Mrs Werter, in a tone of entire confidence, reëssuring a lady who was sitting near her, and who appeared in despair about an awkward, overgrown girl of fourteen or fifteen, with angular elbows, and protruding chin, and everything that was *not* elegant, trying, bashful and disconcerted, to get through a quadrille in any way in the back room,—had she not heard her concluding observation to this poor lady? “Do n’t distress yourself, but trust to me, and when you return to Bath six months hence come and see what your daughter will be then.”

“If such a change can be worked in such a girl,” thought Flora, “how easy it will be to cure me of my only fault.”

When the lesson was at an end, many of those fidgety mothers who are full of anxiety to be fed with praise, or to be able to modify or deprecate censure, waited their opportunity for a few precious words with poor Mrs Werter,

who in her heart must have felt like a reined-in horse champing the bit, and impatient to be off. Mrs George, who made the opportunities which others waited for, walked up direct to her, and at once securing her attention, drew her aside, and made the most convenient arrangement that could be had for Flora's lessons. The artist eye of Mrs Werter, accustomed to appreciate the beautiful, fell well-pleased upon the lovely face of so promising a pupil, and after the interchange of a few pleasant, polite speeches, Mrs George, followed by the admiring Flora, who thought she did everything in a more skilful way than any one she had ever known, made her exit in the most approved manner.

After giving her attention to some importunate beings who had nothing particular to say, and who yet were determined to be heard, Mrs Werter walked up her almost deserted room, to greet one who had been quietly waiting for her. Her manner changed from its extreme

and guarded politeness to one of very natural pleasure, as with a friendly pressure she took the hand of Eleanor.

"This is very kind of you, Miss Stuart; I was afraid you would be gone before I was at liberty to speak to you."

"That was not likely, as I wished so much to have a little conversation with you."

"I am indebted to you, I find, for this letter," said Mrs Werter, taking one from the pocket of her dress; "the strangest and most pleasing, I think, that I ever received; and, as you may suppose, I have had similar communications from the most opposite people."

"Indeed!" returned Eleanor with a smile. "I am curious to know how such a letter could produce so pleasing an effect."

"I cannot tell you exactly how," said Mrs Werter, smiling too, "but there is something about it so manly and straightforward, so simple and so polite,—quite chivalrous, I do assure you, as if a lady's attention bestowed

upon a gentleman would be a favour that could never be requited ; I am prepared to be quite charmed with Sir Allan Mountjoy."

"Which you will not be when you see him ; at first you will be very much disappointed, but I want you to pass on from this feeling, though this I need scarcely ask you, for having recognised beauty of mind, you will be eager to make it work outwardly and produce harmony of movement."

"Miss Stuart," exclaimed Mrs Werter enthusiastically, "it is a treat to talk with you, for you so entirely appreciate the most exalted aims of such a calling as mine, yours being so different from the vulgar reading of ordinary minds."

"An appreciation which you have taught me, and for which I shall be grateful all my life. You know that when I left the country and first came to you, my mind was engrossed with the excellence of pursuits purely intellectual (as I then understood the intellectual), and then you showed me how an art, which, to speak

the truth, I at that time despised, is of the utmost importance, and how its influence may be felt at all times, how it gives the harmony which makes virtue attractive, the movement which does not annoy the fastidious or irritable, and the gentle action, so soothing in misery or sickness. I thought very much upon the subject then when it was new to me, and it struck me that the art is a high and a holy one, when used for its real end, which tries to restore to us any portion of that grace and outward perfection in which we were first created."

To have that for which we labour with the tension both of body and of mind justly understood, is inexpressibly soothing. Mrs Werter made no reply, though these words had fallen upon her spirit like balm.

"But," said Eleanor with a smile, "I did not come to take up your time with my own notions, but to talk about my old friend Sir Allan Mountjoy. . You know that I knew him so well when a boy, that I am naturally interested in what

concerns him now ; and I want to interest you very warmly too ; for no one so well as yourself can remove one of his troubles. I want you to take him at his word exactly, and not to mind what you say to him, or what you tell him ; in fact, to treat him as he asks you to do, as if he were a little child. He has the mind of a philosopher, and he is quite aware that there are some things which cannot be attained unless we return to the simplicity and teachableness of childhood."

"You have given me a difficult task and a delicate one," returned Mrs Werter, with gravity.

" I am aware of it ; but I am sure you can accomplish it, if you will. And then only think what good you will have done, in removing that awkward fear and morbid feeling which otherwise will cling to this man for life, making him shrink from meeting his fellows, or, if he does so, doing it under the disadvantages of reluctance and mortification. Would you, dear Mrs Werter, allow a man of family,

fortune, talent, and principle to shrink into himself, and become a hermit, because he is ignorant of those small things which the empty-headed fops, who are now parading up and down Milsom Street, know, as they fancy, by intuition?"

"Certainly *not*, dear Miss Stuart," said Mrs Werter, with a smile.

"And when Mr Werter is giving the lesson, you will manage to be often present, for though we yield the palm to men in many things, yet in matters like these there is nothing like a woman's tact and powers of minute observation."

"Depend upon me," said Mrs Werter, with another good-natured smile. "And how did you induce this gentleman to come to us at all?"

"Oh, I made a great effort, and then was astonished at my own success, as no doubt many other persons would be, could they overcome a reluctance to speak upon an awk-

ward subject, which is giving to another pain which might be removed; now good-bye, I must detain you no longer."

"Good-bye—good-bye," said Mrs Werter, with the utmost cordiality and friendliness; and the eye of this experienced judge rested in admiration on the calm and refined elegance of Eleanor's retreating figure.

CHAPTER XVI.

If thou art worn and hard beset
With sorrows that thou wouldst forget,
If thou wouldst read a lesson that will keep
Thy heart from fainting and thy soul from sleep ;
Go to the woods and hills !—LONGFELLOW.

“ Yes,” thought Allan Mountjoy, “ the constant depression of those with whom we live is a trial to the spirits, and the daily contact of mind with mind has an effect which in our more sanguine moments of independent feeling we refuse to believe.” He was standing with his arms folded (a habit with him, as with many men when deep in thought) on the summit of Beechen Cliff, and his eye rested on a glorious view of the fair city of Bath,

lying in the valley below him, glowing in the full, clear sunlight of a brilliant, frosty morning. Until he had arrived at this spot, and paused—where a few scattered beech-trees remain of the many which probably at one time gave its name to the Cliff—he had been walking with rapid strides in the full enjoyment of that exuberance of bodily power which is the happy privilege of the strong. By nature there was scarcely any ingredient of the morbid in Allan Mountjoy's temperament—a happy, sunny-tempered, hardy, fearless child had he originally been before he became old enough to feel and to understand the strange anomaly of his position; even then his inherent buoyancy of spirit enabled him to overcome much, but it could not do everything; and many a bitter seed had been sown in a soil strong to bring forth fruit for good or for evil. Hardy indeed had the wheat sprung up, towering with its rich burden above the tares—but still the tares were there, and vigorous must be the

effort that could uproot them now. Few spirits have ever battled in the inward warfare of the soul more than his had done ; perhaps fewer still have been so often victorious by the power of a strong will tempered by the deepest humility ; that humility which is ever aware of its weakness, that strength which rests upon a foundation which cannot be shaken. He had stood and thought long, with the glory of nature and the fair order of civilized life, both, as it were, spread out before him ; and his thoughts, which had begun with the one, had passed on the other, with feelings almost too deep to find utterance even to his own heart. On self they rested long, but in self they did not end. His gaze, which had been abstractedly sweeping over all the points of view, seeing, but not really heeding them, at last fell upon the South Parade ; looking from the spot where he was standing, small, but distinct and clear in a full gleam of sunshine. There was something to call the spirit out of itself ; there lay a tangi-

ble, real duty of life, not the less urgent because self-imposed, and as binding as gratitude could make it to a generous heart. Little bitternesses of feeling now passed away ; for what to a great spirit, conscious of the real end of being, now appeared the satirical judgment of the thoughtless and inconsiderate, compared with the work of restoring to itself a powerful mind undergoing the great affliction of a trial which brought bitterness instead of chastening? Then followed the remembrance of the effect of his daily contact with depression, and the necessity of seeking a remedy. "I have had what he cannot enjoy," said Allan to himself,—“this invigorating walk, and this soothing power of solitude, in which to battle undisturbed with my irritable and rebellious thoughts. I must remember that though I may go out in a humour moody and out of patience, I can vent all that is evil in wild and rapid exercise, without hurting the feelings of any—but he,

poor man, is chained down to one spot—confined to one view, hearing only a monotonous succession of sounds. And I, in my evil judging heart, thought, before I came out, how much more *dignified* his great intellect would show itself if he were patient and resigned. How *dare* we judge another? Ay, how *dare* we?”

Allan Mountjoy unfolded his arms and began slowly to descend the Cliff, and to finish a walk the beauty of which is much impaired by its termination, because, after having had our sensations elevated and refined by the pure breeze and the sweet view on the summit of the hill, we have, on quitting it, to enter the town by the unpicturesque and dusty route of the old bridge over the Avon, where the impression from surrounding objects to the sensitively delicate almost counteracts the effect of what has been just before enjoyed. Happily, however, Allan possessed those strongly braced nerves which do not fluctuate with every change of scene; and so he passed by

cottages with very worn-looking garments hung out to dry, and under the railway arch, with its dark unsightly stains of damp, and over the old bridge, and by second-rate dusty-looking shops, and so on through Henry Street to the Parade; and when he arrived at the door of his temporary home, it was with feelings as fresh and invigorated as though he had been a bird swift upon the wing, and had flown at once from the Cliff with its scattered beeches to the spot. He entered the sitting-room upon the ground-floor, chosen because easier of access for the invalid. He found Herr Schlegel just in the attitude in which he had left him, with his right arm hanging hopelessly down, and the same expression of irritable depression upon his face.

He gave not the slightest token of being aware of Allan's entrance, and to his first observation he made no reply.

"How I wish I could bring woman's influence to bear upon this saddened heart,"

thought Allan. "She can often do what we cannot."

He rang the bell, and ordered up some of the nourishment allowed, which he was always studying how to vary with a solicitude in which the "fair spirit" he had been wishing to have for his minister could not have exceeded him.

After eating, poor Herr Schlegel was generally more composed; it was a sort of occupation, a something to do, which changed the painful current of thought ever dwelling upon the one dark theme.

"I must do something to rouse him which I have not yet done," thought Allan; "if he goes on in this way he will be mad! Yes, the mind that sustained and nourished mine, the intellect whose spell lured me from the paths of ruin, will be overthrown."

He bowed his head and shaded his eyes in deep and solemn thought.

"Is there nothing in the newspaper?" asked Herr Schlegel, querulously.

Allan started up and seized the paper, quite charmed with this expression of interest in outward things; his eye ran over it, but every subject he came to looked trivial, which is often the case when the mind is much excited.

"Do n't read if you do n't wish it," said Herr Schlegel, impatiently. "God help me, my poor sight is going, and it is hard to depend upon that of others."

Allan immediately began reading a highly eulogistic review of Macaulay's History of England.

"There, that will do," muttered his auditor, before he had got half through it; "*my* work will never be reviewed," and he leaned his head on the back of his chair and closed his eyes. Allan then tried an article on Russian policy.

“Do stop, for pity’s sake stop, and let me go to sleep.”

Allan stopped, and then sorrowfully turned over the paper to find something for his own amusement.

“Allan, do put down the paper, I cannot bear the rustling noise.”

So Allan put it down, and folded his arms, and placed his feet upon the fender, and spent the next hour in a deep reverie, watching sometimes the glowing embers in the grate, and sometimes the features of the slumbering old man. What would Lady Crampton have said, could she have seen the last of all the Mountjoys doing what any old, paid nurse from the United Hospital could in her opinion have done equally well?

“There must be something wanting in my efforts,” mused Allan, “or surely they would bear more cheering fruit; and yet perhaps not so—there are some circumstances in which man

must feel how powerless he is, and when, having done all that his poor wisdom can teach him to do, he must use another kind of strength, that which waits patiently, and is still."

CHAPTER XVII.

“ I count myself in nothing else so happy,
As in a soul remembering my good friends ;
And as my fortune ripens with my love,
It shall be still thy true love’s recompense.”

King Richard II.

AND more earnestly than ever did Allan Mountjoy go on with his labour of gratitude and love, making use of all that money, and skill, and care could do, for the cure of him whom, to his dying day, he would ever remember as the friend of his own sore need ; and to all his efforts he now added a more patient, waiting trust, a tempered and peace-bringing hope of that blessing which, sooner or later, is sure to follow the pure and single-minded aim.

And by slow degrees improvement came at last. At first its dawning seemed no greater than that small cloud, like a man's hand, the harbinger to the prophet of the abundant life-giving rain ; but it went on increasing, and with it the young, manly heart of Allan swelled high with a joy which those who have felt it can alone understand. This, then, was to be the blessed first-fruit of that wealth which he had received but as a doubtful good, but for which he now thanked heaven with the dawn and close of each returning day. What a garner it now appeared of golden store, of which he, the happy steward, could distribute to all who needed. No thought could be now of repining that it had come too late ; there can be no too late with One who judges for us, and in whose hand our times and seasons are.

After a very severe winter, spring was setting in unusually early ; and now when a cheering sun almost every day shone down on the fine broad pavement of the South

Parade, Allan would come out at noon, supporting with his strong arm the feeble steps of the old man, who was now able to walk for nearly an hour at a time. As the doctors had predicted, with his health his eyesight improved, and the chance of its permanent recovery was the greater for the precautions taken by Allan to prevent its being tried too soon ; precautions which required many a skilful manœuvre, and which were carried sometimes at the cost of many a contest before which a less firm will than Allan's would have given way.

"I don't believe any one but you could have saved him," said the kind physician who had shared all his consultations and anxieties ; and those words were sweeter music than Allan had ever heard in his life before.

Now that the mind of the invalid was recovering its tone, though his strong, patient nurse kept writing materials most rigorously out of his way, he would encourage him to

talk of the long-cherished work, and at his request he would read to him short passages at a time from the small portion written before his illness ; and on these Herr Schlegel would reflect and consider whether they required alteration, or if they really conveyed his full meaning in all its intended bearings ; and thus a proper fuel was found for that intellectual fire which in some minds, once lighted, will burn on for a life-time, to save or to destroy.

And all this time, though such unwearying attention was given by Allan to his old friend, he was never unmindful of his other duties, of those responsibilities which had at first appeared so perplexing and overwhelming. How did he regard them now ?

As a fundamental principle, he considered himself as holding his riches and his ancient name as a stewardship of which he must give an account ; and that account must not be vaguely set aside for the hour when he should be passing away from earth, but it must be

rendered now daily before the bar of his own conscience, and before the judgment of all right-minded men. He would study the details of business and the requirements of his position as earnestly and indefatigably as men study the profession by which they earn their bread.

He would personally look into every affair of consequence, and he would be careful that minor matters were intrusted to agents who would not abuse his confidence.

Though firm as a rock in carrying out his own ideas of right, he laid it down as a rule to be ever ready to receive the arguments and suggestions of others, that the path of right might be made quite clear to him.

He would carefully consider every letter he received, and always answered it as soon as he had gained the information required to form a sound judgment upon it, much to the surprise of those with whom he transacted business, who had received but little attention from

his predecessors, and expected even less from him.

The claims of others, especially of the poor and friendless, were attended to before anything that concerned his own private interest, and that for two reasons ; first, because if time were wanting, it seemed more just that he should be the sufferer from the delay ; and, secondly, because he considered that when the fresh springs of thought are given to an unselfish purpose, we are the less likely to be tempted to be hard or selfish in that which personally touches ourselves.

And in scrupulously endeavouring to carry out these and other rules for his guidance, Allan Mountjoy was training himself to become that incalculable blessing, a really good landlord ; and in doing so he indulged in no Utopian dreams of unheard-of improvements and unexampled social good,—he was merely in all humility trying day by day to fit himself for the state of life to which he had been so

unexpectedly called ; and in his knowledge of his own ignorance, and of the darkness over his way which he had yet to enlighten, he felt himself very far behind the least successful of those who were conscientiously treading the same path before him. Surely "in all labour there is profit," and this truth was daily felt by this strong, earnest mind, bent upon employing its energies in a direction which was right, healthful, and natural.

The sense of personal deficiency, at first so great as to threaten to nullify all the good gifts of fortune, began to diminish more and more as the real objects of life stood out stronger and clearer from the mists which had at one time obscured them.

That sense of deficiency was diminished, but it was not lost ; and when felt it was accepted as a wholesome discipline ever leading to improvement. He knew (Eleanor Stuart had told him) that the feelings now merged in expanded views and great efforts were liable at any

time to return, and to bring with them their strong power to mortify or to distress. She had not shrunk from speaking to him openly and plainly, almost as a man speaks to himself; and she had not suffered him to suppose, as she saw he was sometimes fain to do, that what had been lulled had been laid asleep for ever. Her woman's eye saw clearly the one weak point of this strong character, and she warned him to fortify it well against all future attacks, and he saw the wisdom of her advice, and resolved to profit by it.

Many were the conversations which were carried on in the dark parlour in Rivers Street, making Mrs Grant feel the easterly winds less than she had ever felt them in Bath before, and constantly increasing her good opinion of Sir Allan Mountjoy, who, though he talked to her in such a simple, deferential manner, was sure to say something which made her feel the nobler or the better for having heard it. Even the gossiping, uncharitable Miss Curryer, when

she chanced to join them, appeared to receive a tone from what was discussed, instead of imparting her own ; and Eleanor perceived this, and acknowledged to herself her own mistake, as she learnt a lesson from this man, who believed that he could gain from her so much while he could teach her nothing.

“ Why, what has tired you so much ? ” he said to her one day in answer to an expression of weariness, after the street door had been closed behind Miss Curryer.

“ There is a littleness about some people’s conversation which always fatigues me,” returned Eleanor ; “ do you not find it so yourself ? ”

“ What do you mean by littleness ? ”

“ Trivial gossiping, and trifling, personal matters, which people should keep to themselves ; and these so minutely entered into as to become inexpressibly tiresome.”

“ Do not people unburden their troubles for the sake of sympathy, which is so rich a cordial to every human heart ? ”

"Yes, their *troubles*, such as deserve the name, but not the little, wearying incidents of their every-day life."

"What appears little to some may be great to others, according as different minds are constituted, and anything that interferes with the equilibrium of our spirits, though it may be little in itself, is certainly not little in its effects. This is your own sentiment," he added, with a smile, "I merely give it you back again."

"And poor Miss Curryer lives so much alone," said Mrs Grant, "that I really don't know what would become of her if she could not come to us and tell her little worries."

"True, madam," returned Sir Allan, in the deferential tone he always used to her. "And do you not feel that it is quite a privilege to be able to comfort any one?"

"Well, I am always very pleased to see her, and to let her have her chat out, but I can't

quite say I took such a high ground as that ;
I will think over what you say."

Eleanor was thinking it over.

"You think that I have been talking too seriously, do you not?" said Sir Allan to her.

"Not quite that, but I am trying to find out how it was that grave sympathy was excited in your mind by what appeared to me tiresome, and sometimes ludicrous."

"Shall I explain my feelings? You of course must be the best judge of your own."

"Do."

"Miss Carryer detailed to us her discomfort on a chilly, depressing morning, first in not having her fire lighted at the proper time; then in its being so carelessly done that it went out; then her difficulty in getting attended to a second time, and then a second and a third failure, added to by irritating circumstances,—wet wood and damp coal that seemed purposely brought, and this followed by impertinent words and a room full of smoke.

“All this I can readily believe could not be admissible in fashionable conversation, but the cry of a heart’s unhappiness, when it is made, should meet with a response; and this was enough to make a lonely lady feel unhappy, not merely because of her discomfort, but because these unkind acts were the sure index of one of the blackest vices of our fallen nature, ingratitude, which, coming from a servant who had received many benefits at her hands from her early youth, must have stung this poor lady to the quick.”

“A very amiable view I am sure,” said Mrs Grant, “and it does you credit, my dear Sir Allan.”

Eleanor said nothing, and Allan, who had spoken very rapidly, felt surprised at himself when he had ceased, for having given utterance to what appeared so like a rebuke; so he took his departure rather abruptly, under the impression that she was offended.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all ;
The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all.—

TENNYSON.

WHEN we truly love, how instantaneously will everything give place to the one bright idea, the loved one is coming ; business, if we have any, is despatched with a glad and eager haste, that it may depart and leave us free ; pleasure engagements are set aside ; indisposition is forgotten ; and inconvenience is a word that for us can have no meaning,—all is convenient, all is right, all is as it should be, for

are we not preparing to taste of a cup which for us contains a draught of the Lethe for all distress and all annoyance, mingled with the sparkling nectar of all things joyous beneath the sun?

Alone, on a sofa in the drawing-room in Rivers Street, sat Flora, a few minutes after the arrival of the mid-day post. A letter was in her hand, which she was turning about uneasily, looking at the seal, at the direction, and then at the seal again; not in any doubt as to the writer, for the characters were well known, and the faithful wax bore the impression of her own gift—not in any suspense as to the contents, for they had been twice read.

The first part of the letter contained an account of Henry Mordaunt's home troubles in Cumberland, of the law suit, which was threatening to terminate unfavourably, and which was a constant source of distress and excitement to his grandfather, and on account of which he had himself just made a second visit to London. Then it spoke of his grandmother's

precarious health, and her dread of his leaving her; she had behaved, he said, like a mother to him. And then was laid open for Flora's gentle sympathy the family anxiety about a cousin, who had started in life with such fair promise, but whose wild habits were now bringing sorrow to all his friends.

All this was told her with the full, free confidence which one loving heart gives to another, in the soothing faith that no details can weary, no minutiae of personal feeling tire. And all this was read by Flora with a composed countenance and a steady hand.

But the letter concluded thus—

“ On Tuesday I shall be at Steyne, to make further arrangements with my curate for my prolonged absence, and on the following day, my precious one, I hope to be in Bath. It would be impossible for me to tell you with what delight I am looking forward to this meeting, short and therefore unsatisfactory as it must be, and how the sight of your sweet face will compensate

me for all the anxiety and sorrow I have suffered in absence, and how it will cheer me onwards through all that is yet to be encountered."

Here the fair brow became clouded, and the little white hand began to turn the letter about uneasily !

With sobs and fast-flowing tears had Flora Lonsdale parted from Henry Mordaunt. All pleasure would be distasteful, all enjoyment spiritless, until that blessed moment when she should behold him again.

Now he was coming !

* * * * *

" My dear ! not ready ! " exclaimed Mrs George, entering the room prepared for going out. " Why, Flora, what can you be thinking about ? I told you that Lady Crampton's carriage would be here at three, and it is just one minute to it now. Quick, quick, child, I can't have her kept waiting a moment."

" I cannot drive to-day," said Flora, looking up from her letter.

" Why not ? " asked Mrs George, in some displeasure.

" Because, because I have had a letter—"

" Well ? "

" Henry is coming—he will be here this afternoon."

" Indeed ! then of course, my dear, you must stay at home. What brings him so unexpectedly ? "

" He had to go to Steyne, and he has just time to come here, for a flying visit, on his way back to the north."

" A flying visit !—did he say a flying visit, my dear ? "

" He said it must be short."

" Short might mean a week," said Mrs George.

" So it might," returned Flora, but not precisely in the tone with which we welcome a glad reprieve.

Mrs George, looking very pleasant and good-natured, sat down to put on her gloves..

“For this week you have engagements which *cannot* be broken, particularly the Amateur Performance to-morrow evening.”

Poor Flora looked blank : between Mrs George’s wishes and Henry Mordaunt’s, what *was* to be done?

“It happens just fortunately for to-night. My little experiment party will quite suit him. Let me see,—Dr Cobbett and his wife,—Mr Curtis and Eleanor—that is not quite enough. I will manage to drive down to the Parade, and ask Sir Allan Mountjoy. We ought not to think anything of his not having called, because he is so very shy. That will do to admiration ;—there will be Mr Mordaunt’s near neighbour, Sir Allan, Dr Cobbett, a grave, clever antiquarian, and his wife, a prim, elderly lady of the old school ; Mr Curtis, a straightforward country gentleman, who will quite enjoy the chance of a

little chat about the Poor Laws, &c., and Eleanor."

Is it to be supposed that kind Mrs George would have said all this, could she have guessed its effect upon Flora ?

Here was an enumeration of the company supposed to be exactly suited to the taste of her affianced husband, and the speech, as it were, shut him out from that brighter and gayer world which she had found so dazzling.

"Lady Crampton is late," continued Mrs George. "Just button that glove for me, my love; thank you."

Here a loud knock resounded through the house.

"Ah, here she is; good-bye, my dear, I will make your excuses,—stay, I was forgetting one thing; you will give my compliments to Mr Mordaunt, and ask him to tea this evening. You had better lay a slight stress upon the *tea*, in case he might be sitting on till dinner time; for I make it a rule never to ask gentlemen to

dine in lodgings, they require so many things, and give so much trouble.”

And Mrs George disappeared.

* * * *

A few minutes after, the door was softly opened, and Eleanor entered, with a roll of music in her hand.

Seeing Flora with her letter before her, and her preoccupied air, she said she would not interrupt her, and prepared to retreat.

“ No, Eleanor,” said Flora, entreatingly, “ stay and sit with me, I feel so nervous.”

Eleanor immediately sat down by her. “ But why do you feel nervous, and why are you alone ? ”

“ I was engaged to go out, but I have just had a letter, and—and Henry is coming.”

“ I am so glad to hear that.”

“ Yes, he will be here this afternoon, and I am so nervous,”—thinking (Flora was going to add) that every moment I shall hear his knock ; but she corrected herself, feeling this

would sound strange, and substituted, "thinking about the dinner."

"My dear Flora," said Eleanor, smiling.

"Yes, but it *is* a nervous thing," returned Flora, pettishly, "for I am told to invite him to tea, and of course he will expect to be asked to dinner."

"Oh, no," said Eleanor, soothingly. "Remember, dear, he has not yet seen your aunt, and he can easily get a dinner at the Lion, or the York House."

"But I think my aunt might have managed it," said Flora, glad to have some open grievance to speak about, lest those deep, dark eyes of Eleanor's might fathom the depths of a strange discomfort, by herself not understood; "she says gentlemen require so many things, and give so much trouble in a lodging; do you think they do?"

"Perhaps your aunt has found it so," replied Eleanor, not giving much attention to

the question, for she was marking Flora's flushed cheek and troubled eye.

These ought not to be.

"Does Mr Mordaunt return to Steyne to remain there?"

"No, he has arranged to be away till Easter; you know he must, he can't well help himself."

"And when do you go home?"

"Why are you always in such a hurry to get rid of me? what harm do I do to you?" exclaimed Flora, crossly.

"Dear Flora," said Eleanor, with that look of affection and real interest which, when we will make use of it, is all-conquering, "you must not misunderstand me; I do wish you to return to Carstone, you know why as well as I do, and sometimes you feel it too. Be not deaf to the voice of your better self; turn away from what can fascinate only for a time, and then will delude and betray. I must speak plainly, even at the risk of offending you: the

way you have been living, speaking, thinking, since you have been here, all are tending to make you what Henry Mordaunt's wife should not be."

"I know it, I know it," sobbed Flora, "I will go home as soon as all these parties are over; I wish I had not promised to go to them."

"That is right, dear Flora; be firm about this, and all will be right."

"And you won't tell Henry how foolish I have been, and about that silly report of my being engaged to Mr Lepel,—nasty, spiteful people, to tell such falsehoods! You won't make him angry with me?"

"I make him angry with you! No, Flora, you alone shall be able to do that, but do not do it. How would you think for one moment that I would help to bring a cloud between you?"

This was said with a gentle sorrow, wholly unlike the indignant reproach that might have fallen from the lips of the proud Eleanor a few

weeks back, when the slightest suspicion of her fastidious honour would have roused her as though she had been a knight of the olden chivalry.

“ No, no, Eleanor, I did not mean that, I do n't know what I am talking about. You are much too good for me ever to think—”

Flora's conscience would not suffer her to finish her sentence, for she remembered how much of evil thought had been instilled into her mind, like a sure, slow poison.

“ Don't trouble yourself about me for a moment, dear Flora; think now of yourself, think of the perfection of happiness within your grasp, and beware how you trifle with it, even for a moment.”

“ No, no, I won't, I will go home as soon as ever I can get away. That disagreeable Mr Lepel, what business had he to be so forward, and to let me be talked about? ”

“ No man can make himself disagreeable or forward unless you suffer it. Take care how

you are deceived on this point ; a woman must guard herself, Flora ; she can do it better than ten thousand armed soldiers could do it for her."

" I dare say you are right, as you always are. I wonder Henry did not choose you instead of me. I dare say you would have suited him, much—much—*much* better," said Flora, in a quivering voice, restraining her tears, because it would never do for Henry Mordaunt to arrive and find her with her eyes red, and ask what it was all about, when there would be no Mrs George at hand to make up the cleverest of answers for her.

Repugnant past expression were these words to the delicacy of Eleanor's spirit, but still she leant down over Flora, to soothe away her distress, though to her own pale cheek had risen a colour bright and burning as that of the Austrian briar under the rays of the noonday sun.

" I wish Mrs George would take you to the

parties with me, and then you would tell me what not to do," said Flora, whose mood under the shadow of Henry Mordaunt's coming was now all humility.

"Never depend upon any circumstances, learn to depend upon yourself, dear," returned Eleanor, softly. With all her penetration she was not aware that it would have been impossible to have given poor Flora a lesson more difficult to learn.

The firm require a great deal of experience before they can be prepared for the irresolution, inconstancy, and dependence upon others which characterize the weak.

When we have to deal with those who are guided by no fixed principles, we often find ourselves at fault, and we know not why.

"I will be more careful always in future," said Flora, "and I will go home as soon as Mrs Fulham's dance is over, whatever my aunt may say to keep me."

"That is right, that is quite right, dear

Flora," said Eleanor, feeling more satisfied about her than she had been at all since her arrival in Bath, for Flora had been speaking naturally, and, according to her interpretation, truthfully, without the little airs and affectation which of late she had assumed even when alone with her cousin.

"Hark!" exclaimed Flora, starting, "that *was* a double knock."

"Good-bye, dear," said Eleanor, cheerfully and encouragingly; and just catching a forced nervous smile from Flora, she quickly left the room and retired to her own. An angel-like serenity was upon her countenance, and a peace ineffable in her heart.

END OF VOL. II.

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